Abstract

Brandon M. Frazier. "Like Foxes Loose in a Chicken Coop"; The Second World War's Forgotten Turkey Shoot. (Under the direction of Dr. Michael A. Palmer) Department of History, April 2007.

On 27 April 1944, the Allies were in the latter stages of Exercise Tiger—an amphibious practice rehearsal for the Normandy invasion. Two days later, Tiger concluded and the last and final practice operation, Exercise Fabius, commenced. But during the early morning of 28 April, two days before the completion of Exercise Tiger, disaster struck three American Landing Ship Tanks (LSTs) in Lyme Bay. The three American LSTs formed part of Convoy T-4, a combination of eight American LSTs and one British escort heading toward Slapton Sands to take part in Exercise Tiger. Nine German E-boats intercepted heavy radio traffic coming from Lyme Bay and quickly raced toward the area to discover Convoy T-4, unaware of the German presence, navigating through English waters. The night was calm with a low quarter moon—perfect weather conditions for an E-boat attack. The nine fast patrol boats plunged into action, released several torpedoes, and destroyed three American LSTs. Historian Carlo D'Este described the E-boats as "like foxes loose in a chicken coop." After several hit-and-run attacks, the nine German E-boats returned to Cherbourg leaving hundreds of Americans dead.

Exercise Tiger demonstrated a clear command failure. Several commanders "assumed"—and failed to act. Their individual decisions, or better yet, indecisions, led to one of the worst naval debacles in World War II. The blunder cost the Allies two irreplaceable LSTs and nearly their most treasured gem—tactical surprise for the Normandy invasion.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine Tiger's command structure. Such an examination demonstrates that poor individual decisions all but assured that the German attack was successful, and an embarrassment for the Allies, but fortunately not to the extent that it jeopardized Neptune.

"Like Foxes Loose in a Chicken Coop"; The Second World War's Forgotten Turkey Shoot

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By
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To Tommy and Beth Thompson, the ORUBO family (Oakmont Runners for Bo), and the late Bo Thompson.

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Introduction

. . . . then it must have been intended for commanders to interpret as they saw fit, which brings the matter to that melting point of warfare—the temperament of the individual commander.

When the moment of live ammunition approaches, the moment to which all his professional training has been directed, when the lives of men under him, the issue of the combat, even the fate of a campaign may depend upon his decision at a given moment, what happens inside the heart and vitals of a commander? Some are made bold by the moment, some irresolute, some carefully judicious, some paralyzed and powerless to act.[1]

On 1 April 1944, while preparing for the Normandy invasion, the Allies agreed to place the United States Naval Forces under the operational control of the Allied Naval Commander Expeditionary Force, Admiral Sir Bertram H. Ramsay. Admiral Ramsey wrote to Admiral Alan Kirk (USN), Commander of Task Force 122, explaining:

> The operations we are planning together call for a degree of co-operation between our Navies which has hitherto never been even contemplated. The intermingling of ships and craft, and indeed of personnel, in the Task Forces, will be such that it might well be thought that there existed not two Navies, but one Navy, and not two nations, but one nation. I believe this is the right spirit in which to approach and deal with the problems which confront us and it is the one which I am confident will prevail to a degree even greater than at present. We have a tough job ahead of us, but united we will see this venture through, and our Armies firmly established on the Continent of EUROPE.[2]

The Allied armies did establish themselves on the European Continent; the Allies succeeded in securing the Normandy beachheads and taking Hitler's fortified Europe. Ramsay's statement, though, of "one Navy" and "one nation" did not become the reality the Allies wished. Differences in culture, egos, experience, strategy, tactics, but most important, the question of command hindered the relationship between the Americans and the British. Myriad shortcomings in command cost the Allies dearly prior to the Normandy invasion.

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[1] Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 167.
[2] From the U.S. Naval Memorial Foundation Collection: Lester C. Haas Papers, Collection No. 677/80. East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C.

The Allies conducted several in-depth practice invasions intended to prepare inexperienced Allied soldiers and sailors for the largest amphibious invasion in human history—Normandy. Hoping to create synergy among the armed forces of their various countries, the Allied powers conducted several elaborate amphibious exercises, each *larger than its* predecessor. The major practice exercises for Normandy were: Duck (Duck I, II, III), Fox, Beaver, followed by Tiger and Fabius (Fabius I, II, III, IV, V, VI), which were the two big dress rehearsals.[3] The Allies conducted several minor exercises as well.

To prepare for the approaching invasion the Allies divided the practice amphibious operations into three parts. According to *Exercise Duck, Introductory Explanation*: "The first were the early major exercises involving troops from several units working together on combined assault and supply problems. In these exercises the various phases of the invasion were covered, including mounting, landing and consolidation of the beachhead."[4] The second group "consisted of smaller exercises participated in by individual units training for their own particular phase of the invasion."[5] The final set "comprised the two dress-rehearsals, FABIUS I and Tiger, in which every attempt was made to duplicate actual battle conditions, and in which the troop line-up was practically the same as for the invasion."[6] The exercises were, in part,

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[3] Roland G. Ruppenthal, *The European Theater of Operations: Logistical Support of the Armies,* vol 1. (Washington D.C: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1953), 345; Nigel Lewis, *Exercise Tiger: The Dramatic True Story of a Hidden Tragedy of World War II* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1990), 31.

[4] United States Army Center of Military History, *Exercises*, Chapter VII, http://www.army/mil/cmh-pg/documents/wwii/beaches/bchs-7.htm, accessed 9/26/2006, 1.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

created to train the young, inexperienced soldiers who would embark on the beaches of Normandy, attempting to thwart Hitler's death grip over the European continent. Allied commanders simulated the conditions that their men would face once they landed on the heavily fortified Normandy beaches.

The Allied commanders chose Slapton Sands, an area in southwestern England, to conduct the amphibious practice operations because the area closely resembled one of the five Normandy beaches, Utah.[7] Since Slapton Sands had been spared German bombardments throughout the war, Allied commanders believed that the area was appropriate to hold the crucial simulated operations.[8] In November 1943, the Allies notified the Devon County Council that under the 1939 War Powers Act, 30,000 farming acres around Devon would be taken for military purposes. Operation Bolero, code name of the United States military buildup in Great Britain, forced three thousand British civilians of the Devon community to evacuate from the area by 20 December 1943.[9]

With the Slapton Sands area now vacant, the Allies began their simulated exercises beginning with Operation Duck, which commenced on 28 December 1943, followed by Operations Fox and Muskrat.[10] Beaver, the fourth operation, began 29 March 1944. The Beaver operation involved the 4th Infantry Division and the 101st Airborne, and was the first operation in which the Allies implemented the use of live ammunition.[11] By using live ammunition in their practice assaults, the exercise landings

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[7] Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 21-22.
[8] Ibid., 6.
[9] Edwin P. Hoyt, *The Invasion Before Normandy* (New York: Stein and Day, 1985), 82; Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 9-10.
[10] Hoyt, *Invasion*, 83-84.
[11] Ibid., 85.

resembled the conditions the Allied soldiers would face across the channel. This series of exercises also allowed men to test the innovative weapons such as flame throwers, sea and airborne rocket launchers, and amphibious tanks that the Allies created for special purposes.[12]

Exercise Tiger was the second-to-last practice operation. Exercise Tiger and Exercise Fabius, the last exercise, were the largest and the most detailed. The main goal for the Allies was to detect various flaws and then correct them in time for Normandy. Frustrated, the Allied commanders found many problems within the practice operations that had to be altered and fixed before the actual invasion.

Exercise Tiger (22 April–30 April 1944) included 300 ships and 30,000 men. Thirty of these ships were LSTs (Landing Ship Tank), a type of amphibious craft.[13] H-Hour (landing hour) began on the morning of 27 April 1944.[14] The U.S. 4th Infantry Division, the 82nd and 101st Airborne Division, the 1st Engineer Special Brigade, and naval and air units partook in the large-scale practice operation.[15] The purpose of Exercise Tiger involved the

> concentration, marshalling, and embarkation troops in the TOR BAY PLYMOUTH area for a short sea voyage and overseas operation, movement by sea under the control of the United States Navy, disembarkation with naval and air support at SLAPTON SANDS, a beach assault using service ammunition, the securing of a beachhead and a rapid advance inland. Two airborne divisions will participate. The range area will be used for firing service ammunition of all types. The exercise will continue during D and D-1 and at least part of D-2 Days with a represented enemy beyond the limits of the range. Resupply of units will be played.[16]

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[12] Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 34.
[13] Eugene E. Eckstam, *Oral Histories-Exercise Tiger, 28 April 1944,* 2000, http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq87-3g.htm.
[14] U.S.S. LST 496 War Diary for Month of April 1944, WD RG 38.
[15] Hoyt, *Invasion*, 85.
[16] Record Group 407, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Entry 427, World War II Operations Reports.

The LST had become a central element in the Allied plans for victory in World War II. Amphibious doctrine played an even greater role as the war progressed and, by 1944, LSTs were in great demand for amphibious landings. The LST was a slow moving amphibious craft; its primary goal was to bring troops and war machines to any hostile shore. The ship was very important to the success of the invasion, since the Allies would depend heavily on these craft during the Normandy invasion; the naval vessel also proved extremely valuable in earlier amphibious landings in North Africa, Sicily, Salerno, Italy, Anzio, and the Pacific campaigns.

The concept for the LST originated in Britain. The British sent the design, known at that time as the Tank Landing Craft (TLC), to the United States in November 1941 and, after alterations, the United States accepted the new design, calling the craft Landing Ship Tank (LST).[17] Of the several types of LSTs built during World War II, the British built Types I and III while the United States constructed Type II craft. There were three sub-classes of the Type II craft built during the war: LST-1 class, LST-491 class, LST-542 class.[18]

The Allies believed that LSTs were vital to the invasion plans because they brought soldiers, ammunition, and war machines to the shorelines. There existed a vast shortage of LSTs before the Normandy invasion; therefore Eisenhower and his staff decided to delay the invasion in order to obtain more LSTs.[19] Dependency upon the

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[17] NavSource Online, *Tank Landing Ship (LST) Index*, http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/16idx.htm, accessed 14 September 2006.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 25-26.

LSTs was summed up in the words of Winston Churchill: "The destinies of two great empires seem to be tied up in some god-damned things called LSTs."[20]

LSTs weighed up to five thousand tons and could only run up to twelve knots. The ship had limited armament, but as one crewman stated in Nigel Lewis's *Exercise Tiger*, "We had guns but we depended on others to defend us."[21] The objective of the LST was to transport men and machines to the shores of a designated beach and unload them in a sound and safe manner. This sluggish type of landing craft was an easy target for faster, more maneuverable warships.

In addition to their tortoise-like and cumbersome movement, LSTs suffered countless technical problems. For example, the craft lacked a sufficient reinforcing system of bulkheads and ribs. Also, the LST did not have a keel, which meant that the lethargic craft could easily beach itself.[22] The absence of a keel also meant that the ship was less seaworthy.

Julius Augustus Furer, in *Administration of the Navy Department in World War II,* described the LST as:

> an ocean-going vessel, 328 feet long, 50-foot beam, twin screw, speed 11 knots, with a 2100-ton carrying capacity. The seagoing draft was 8 feet forward, and 14 feet 4 inches aft, including water ballast. After nosing the ship up onto the beach, a ramp at the bow was lowered, over which the tanks could be disembarked on their own power. By controlling ballast, the ship could be retracked after having discharged its cargo of tanks and personnel. As part of the deckload, an LCT was carried, having the same function as the LST.[23]

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[20] Russell F. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany 1944-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 42.
[21] Quoted in Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 24.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Julius Augustus Furer, *Administration of the Navy Department in World War II* (Washington: U. S. Govt. Print. Off, 1959), 193.

By 1943, amphibious craft were in great demand. Because of their significance, the first session of the 78th United States Congress authorized "the acquisition and conversion or construction of certain landing craft and district craft for the United States Navy, and for other purposes."[24] The bill allowed the United States Navy to build "one million tons of landing craft and district craft of such size, type, and design" for future amphibious operations.[25] On 26 June 1943, Congress approved the appropriation bill for the landing craft and other naval vessels, allotting the Navy $6,324,120,000 for the increased construction.[26]

Eight LSTs involved in operation Tiger originated from these two congressional acts. The ships were built in Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania, and launched and commissioned between July 1943 and January 1944. They formed LST Group 32 (Convoy T-4) and, in 1944, transferred to Europe for the pending invasion. Nine LSTs were originally assigned to Convoy T-4, but on 15 April 1944, LST 508 collided with a British freighter, damaging her port side anchor and her bow doors.[27]

Exercise Tiger involved the group's first work up as an invasion group. Many of the LSTs in Convoy T-4 had been in England for less than a month at the time. In addition, most of the LSTs had never previously operated with one another as a "complete tactical group."[28] Originally, only five LSTs were assigned to LST Group 32

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[24] Public Law 61, Ch., 105, *United States Statutes At Large*, 78th Congress, 1st Session, 26 May 1943, vol. 57, 92.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Public Law 92, Ch., 147, *United States Statutes At Large*, 78th Congress, 1st Session, 26 June 1943, vol. 57, 209.
[27] Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 232.
[28] CTF 125 to CIC U.S. Fleet, Action Between LST Convoy and Enemy E Boats, 28 April 1944, report concerning, AOR RG 38.

under Commander Bernard J. Skahill; the three remaining LSTs (511, 496, 289) were originally assigned to LCT Group 31, known as Force O. Furthermore, most of the American soldiers and sailors on board the various LSTs had also just arrived in England. Their commanding officers were either ex-enlisted men with twelve to sixteen years' experience, or reserve officers with one to two years' active duty.[29]

Most important, men on board lacked confidence in the LST as a naval vessel. Pharmacist Mate Frank R. Feduik remembered the first time he saw his newly assigned LST. "Once I reached England I was assigned to the *LST-338* [Landing Ship Tank 338]. It had just returned from Italy, where it was in the invasion of Sicily. When I saw this thing, I said, 'Oh, God. This can't be my ship. It's ugly. What is it?'"[30] Feduik remembered that "there was an old saying that if you were assigned to the amphibious fleet in the Navy, you had to have screwed up somewhere. I hadn't done anything wrong and I wondered why I had been assigned to this LST. I spent the rest of my overseas time on that ship."[31] Instead of calling an LST a Landing Ship Tank, crews typically deemed the craft such nicknames as "Long Slow Targets," "Large Stranded Target," or in the Pacific, "Last Ship to Tokyo."[32] One soldier stated that the LST he boarded was "shoddily constructed."[33] The soldier added that the LST "constantly creaked even at its mooring. I thought the shallow-draft LST might capsize if the sea became rough, or if we

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Naval Historical Center, Frank R. Feduik, *Oral History - Invasion of Normandy, June 1944*, http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq87-3d.htm, accessed 6 October 2006.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 23.
[33] Quoted in Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 24.

were attacked."[34] Furthermore, crewman Emanuel Rubin noted that LSTs "were cramped and crowded."[35] He explained:

> You lived on top of one another. When there were soldiers aboard, you couldn't move. It smelled always of people. I used to dream of being on an aircraft carrier, like a city, instead of on this ship where we were all packed in like sardines, working around the clock like haulage contractors. [36]

Owing to their slothfulness, LSTs were easy prey to faster, more maneuverable ships. Throughout World War II German vessels known as E-boats constantly prowled the English Channel. An E-boat was a small, fast ship, somewhat comparable to the American PT-boat, notorious for its fast-attack methods and surprise night raids. The German vessel stretched from 90 to 105 feet long, and could reach speeds of thirty-five to forty knots.[37] Although E-boats were fast, to execute an attack they had to slow to ten knots in order to launch their torpedoes.[38] Therefore, their tactics were to advance toward the enemy at high speed, slow and release their torpedoes, and then retreat at full throttle into the darkness toward the nearest safe haven. E-boats were unstable in rough waters, thus they required good weather conditions in order to execute successful attacks.[39] Because of Allied air and naval supremacy in the English Channel, E-boats were only effective at night.

The British knew the damage that German E-boats could inflict upon Allied shipping; "the E-boats had found the Channel prime nighttime hunting grounds, and

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[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 25.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Hoyt, *Invasion*, 99.
[38] James Foster Tent, *E-Boat Alert* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 41.
[39] Ibid., 34.

during earlier engagements had sunk eighteen ships off South Dorset and Devon."[40] One of these engagements occurred on 26 February 1943, when two German E-boats sank four British ships. E-boats also destroyed the Norwegian destroyer *Eskdale* on 13 April 1943.[41] Fortunately for Eisenhower and the Allies, though, the earlier practice operations did not encounter E-boats because of terrible weather conditions.[42] German aircraft were the only problem during the early operations; on the morning of 26 April 1944, at 8:21a.m., German airplanes flew over the Plymouth area. Luckily for the Allies, it was only a reconnaissance mission.[43]

Because of the E-boat threat, the Allies incorporated warning measures in their briefings, war plans, and Top Secret-Bigot documents. The following E-boat information came from Lester C. Haas, a photographer assigned to Admiral Alan Kirk's Western Task Force, who later landed on Omaha Beach.

> Particulars of Enemy E-boats. German E-boats (S-boote) are used for torpedo and minelaying operations. They are designed exclusively for offensive action. E-Boats can operate in seas up to Force 5 or 6. Smooth seas are preferred for minelaying sorties, but torpedo attacks can be carried out in rougher weather. Operations are normally, but not necessarily, conducted during the dark periods of the moon. Torpedoes are fired singly and have a range of 6,500 yards. Direct cooperation has been found between E-Boats and aircraft. Planes have dropped flares in order to silhouette targets for E-boat attack.[44]

Type	Displacement	Length	Speed	Armament
"A"	63 (full load)	92'	33	1-0.87"; 1 mg; 2-21" TT and 2 spares
"B"	86 (full load)	106'	34.5	1-0.87"; 2-0.78"AA; 2 mg; 2-21" TT and 2 spares
"C"	95	106'	38	2-0.79"; 2 mg; 2-21" TT and 2 spares

Source: From the U.S. Naval Memorial Foundation Collection: Lester C. Haas Papers, Collection No. 677/80, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C.

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[40] Carlo D'Este, *Eisenhower* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 515.
[41] Hoyt, *Invasion*, 97.
[42] Tent, *E-boat Alert*, 13.
[43] Hoyt, *Invasion*, 91.
[44] From the U.S. Naval Memorial Foundation Collection: Lester C. Haas Papers, Collection No. 677/80, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C.

While Devon had attracted little attention from the Luftwaffe, the Lyme Bay area was no stranger to E-boat activity.[45] The British were aware that German E-boats frequently patrolled English waters; thus, in January 1944, British Admiral Ralph Leatham of the Plymouth command warned the Allies of the threat posed by German U-boats, aircraft, or E-boats posed to the practice operations. If the Germans did attack, the American commander in charge at the time had authorization to deal with the situation as he saw fit.[46] American Rear Admiral Don P. Moon, leading naval officer in Exercise Tiger and commanding naval officer of the Utah beach landings, aware of the potential E-boat threat, held a conference on 24 April 1944 with all commanding officers, including Commander Skahill and Lieutenant Commander George C. Giddes, two days prior to Exercise Tiger. During this conference, Moon discussed the E-boat threat.[47]

On 27 April 1944, the Allies were in the latter stages of Exercise Tiger. Two days later, Tiger concluded and the last and final practice operation, Exercise Fabius, commenced. On the night of 27 April and early morning of 28 April 1944, the weather suited E-boat activity. During the night of 27 April, owing to German air intelligence reports along with information from radio and radar equipment in France, nine German E-boats of the 5th and 9th Schnellboote flotillas prepared for a mission in the English Channel during the same night Convoy T-4 participated in Exercise Tiger. Author Edwin Hoyt explained: "Radio and radar equipment in France picked up the movement of Skahill's command, Convoy T-4, and before midnight Captain Peterson's headquarters

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[45] Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 53.
[46] Plymouth War Order 138, 28 February 1944, AOR RG 38; The C-in-C Plymouth to Naval Commander Western Task Force, Exercise Tiger, 5 May 1944, AOR RG 38; Hoyt, *Invasion*, 83.
[47] CTF 125 to CIC U.S. Fleet, Action between LST Convoy and Enemy E Boats, report concerning, 6 May 1944, AOR RG 38; Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 55.

[Wimereux, near Boulogne] had the information that it was out in the Lyme Bay area. The Germany navy had divided all the waters of the world into small grid squares marked on special charts."[48] Peterson told the commanders that they would find the "targets" in grid square BF 2398.[49] Six E-boats came from Korvetten Kapitaen Klug's 5th flotilla, while Kapitaenleutnant Freiherr von Mirbach, leader of the 9th flotilla, provided three more.[50] German E-boats sped from Cherbourg, just as the American convoy proceeded toward Lyme Bay. As a result, LSTs and E-boats collided in a violent skirmish just off the English coast that left several hundreds of Americans dead and the prospects for a successful Normandy invasion in question, if only briefly.

In the early morning of 28 April 1944, two days before the completion of Exercise Tiger, disaster struck three American Landing Ship Tanks (LSTs) in Lyme Bay. The three American LSTs formed part of Convoy T-4, a combination of the eight American LSTs and one British escort heading toward Slapton Sands to take part in Exercise Tiger. The morning of 28 April, the Cherbourg E-boats intercepted heavy radio traffic coming from Lyme Bay and quickly raced toward the area to discover Convoy T-4, unaware of the German presence, navigating through English waters. The night was calm with a low quarter moon—perfect weather conditions for an E-boat attack. The nine fast patrol boats plunged into action, released several torpedoes, and destroyed three American LSTs. Historian Carlo D'Este described the E-boats as "like foxes loose in a

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[48] Hoyt, *Invasion*, 102.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 97.

chicken coop."[51] After several hit-and-run attacks, the nine German E-boats returned to Cherbourg leaving hundreds of Americans dead.

The Allies routinely deployed patrol ships throughout the English waters to prevent potential E-boat attacks on the important practice operations. During Tiger, the Allies deployed four special patrols around the Portland Bill area. These patrols contained three motor torpedo boats, two motor gun boats, and four *Oboe*-class destroyers. The Allies sent a fifth patrol, consisting of eight motor torpedo boats, to Cherbourg, France to disrupt potential E-boat activity.[52] The 5th and 9th German flotillas nevertheless evaded the Allied patrols off Cherbourg and launched an effective attack against the American convoy.

Like Operation Neptune, its predecessor, Exercise Tiger, was a complex and detailed plan. Unfortunately for the Allies, two critical errors left Convoy T-4 defenseless against the nine German E-boats. Convoy T-4 was on a separate radio frequency from Plymouth and its escort at the time of the attack. The LSTs could neither communicate with Plymouth nor with their single escort. The Plymouth headquarters received messages from other ships in the English Channel that German E-boats had left Cherbourg and were heading toward the Lyme Bay area, where Convoy T-4 was scheduled to transit before the embarkation at Slapton Sands. As previously mentioned, the convoy only had one escort by its side that night. The original plan called for the convoy to have two escorts, but one was accidentally rammed as it was leaving port. Plymouth ordered the ship back to port once the rammed escort reported its damage,

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[51] D'Este, *Eisenhower*, 515.
[52] CTF 125 to COMINCH, CTF-122, CTF-127, Dispatch, AOR RG 38.

leaving Convoy T-4 short of protection. Later, the commander of the *Scimitar* stated that he believed that his damage was slight and that his ship was seaworthy for escort duty. *Azalea,* the other escort provided for the convoy, watched as her sister escort sailed back to port.[53] *Azalea* was "a 205-foot Royal Navy corvette armed with a single 4-inch cannon and a few antiaircraft guns."[54] She had a maximum speed of sixteen knots and was "ill-equipped to deal with anything so fast and elusive as an E-boat, though she might be able to do some damage."[55] *Azalea*'s captain, Lieutenant Commander George C. Giddes, did not understand the reasons for *Scimitar*'s return to port, but decided to not report this to the Plymouth command or commander Skahill.[56]

Nor could Giddes communicate with the convoy. As the *Scimitar* sailed back to port, the convoy of eight LSTs were now inexplicably on a separate communication frequency from Plymouth as well as her one remaining, unsuitable escort. In retrospect, the convoy was sailing blindly into the jaws of the German E-boats.

Exercise Tiger's chain of command also contributed to Convoy T-4's destruction. Admiral Bertram Ramsey, leader of the combined Allied navy, created a command system based on coordination between the two Allied countries that left all commanders, both British and American, with some role in the practice operations.[57] As a result, the operation lacked unity of command. On paper the command layout may have seemed clear, but it disintegrated once the American convoy departed from British ports.

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[53] Ralph C. Greene and Oliver E. Allen, "What Happened off Devon," *American Heritage* 36, no. 2 (Feb/Mar 1985), http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1985/2/1985_2_26.shtml.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] In some sources it was spelled Geddes and other times it was spelled Giddes.
[57] Christopher Yung, *Gators of Neptune* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006), 5.

Exercise Tiger's command structure included a mixture of British and American naval forces. For example, an American rear admiral, Don P. Moon, was the overall naval leader of the Utah beach landings; Commander Skahill led Convoy T-4. Because of Ramsey's command structure, however, the British, too, also had a hand in the exercise. The leader of the Plymouth sector was Admiral Leatham and the two escorts for the eight LSTs were part of the Royal Navy.

The absence of a unified and easily understood command structure has complicated the work of historians. There are four major historical works that discuss Exercise Tiger in detail: Edwin P. Hoyt's *The Invasion Before Normandy* (1985); Ralph Greene and Oliver Allen's "What Happened Off Devon" (1985); Ken Small's *The Forgotten Dead* (1988); and Nigel Lewis' *Exercise Tiger* (1990). Each source provided insight into the events that transpired on 28 April 1944. All cover the days immediately following the catastrophe, and provide insight into the days immediately after the Exercise Tiger debacle.

Historians often have to address the "what-ifs" in history: the possible scenarios that could have happened but did not. Exercise Tiger is no exception. For instance, what if different individual leaders were in command? Could the entire debacle have been avoided and hundreds of lives spared? Do individual leaders and their command decisions ultimately affect the outcome of warfare? This paper demonstrates that they do. Another "what-if" that Exercise Tiger posed was: what if the Germans had realized the importance of their devastating attack? If the Germans had taken prisoners or captured the valuable documents on board the destroyed LSTs, then they would have

received precious information about the upcoming Normandy invasion. Fortunately for the Allies, the E-boats were not built for those types of missions, but were instead night raiders whose mission was to "seek and destroy."

While the Germans "won" the confused engagement that began in the early morning of 28 April 1944, they were as enveloped in the "fog of war" as were the LSTs in the convoy. Had the Germans realized that the LSTs formed no ordinary convoy and taken advantage of their destruction, the subsequent history of the Normandy invasion and the war itself might have been different. Until the Allies could be certain that the Germans' action was serendipitous and not by design—based on some intelligence—the Normandy invasion remained in a state of uncertainty. Eisenhower and his staff scrambled to discover if the Germans had recovered any documents from the Lyme Bay disaster. Fortunately for the Allies, intelligence sources revealed that the Germans did not recognize the importance of their surprise attack.

Without question, Exercise Tiger was one the worst Allied command blunders in World War II. Confusion and ignorance marked the entire exercise, spelling disaster for the Americans on board the three stricken LSTs. Historian Edwin P. Hoyt argued that "the tragedy of the LSTs was heightened by errors. Whether or not they could have been avoided is another matter. Given the frenetic pace of Allied preparations on the eve of the invasion of France, it is not so remarkable that errors were made, as that so few errors were made and so few lives lost in what some regarded as a 'useless' manner." Hoyt further stated that "Operation Tiger was neither a total foul-up nor a waste of time. Given the circumstances that prevailed, the tragedy probably could not have been

avoided." Exception must be taken with Hoyt's assessment of the E-boat attack. The errors made in Exercise Tiger could have been avoided, regardless of the scale and speed of buildup for the Normandy invasion. At no time, especially because of the secrets that the exercise contained, should there have been a command breakdown within the Exercise Tiger operation. The thesis is simple: individual decisions determine the outcome of warfare, and the decisions made during Tiger were poor.

The thesis begins with an in-depth description of the E-boat attack based upon LSTs' war diaries and after action reports. There follows a chapter dedicated to the chain of command problem. In this chapter, the focus centers upon individuals who took part in Exercise Tiger, their naval background, and the command errors they committed during the exercise. The subsequent chapter discusses the aftermath of the attack and the Allies' distress, which for several days left the prospective Normandy invasion in question. The conclusion summarizes the major points: the disaster was avoidable had the necessary precautions taken place; the individual leaders within the operation made unfortunate decisions that helped trigger a preventable incident; and the attack generated a state of alarm within the Allied chain of command. Finally, the incident, because of the multiple mistakes, must be considered one of the worst preventable naval blunders during World War II.

In the end, the Normandy invasion was a resounding victory for the Allies. After Normandy, the Allies swept through Europe and by the spring of 1945 were in Berlin. Exercise Tiger became another footnote in World War II scholarship. History forgot the Lyme Bay disaster and the men who were part of the tragedy. The Exercise Tiger

disaster demonstrated that many adjustments needed addressing if the most important amphibious invasion in history were to succeed. Exercise Tiger proved to be more than just another practice operation. Instead of accomplishing Eisenhower's goals, Tiger magnified the Allies' fears, demonstrating that still more corrections and adjustments needed addressing before Normandy. Otherwise, the invasion could ultimately fail and the long, bloody war could continue for many more grueling years. Before the Tiger command problem is analyzed, though, the story of the disaster must be addressed.

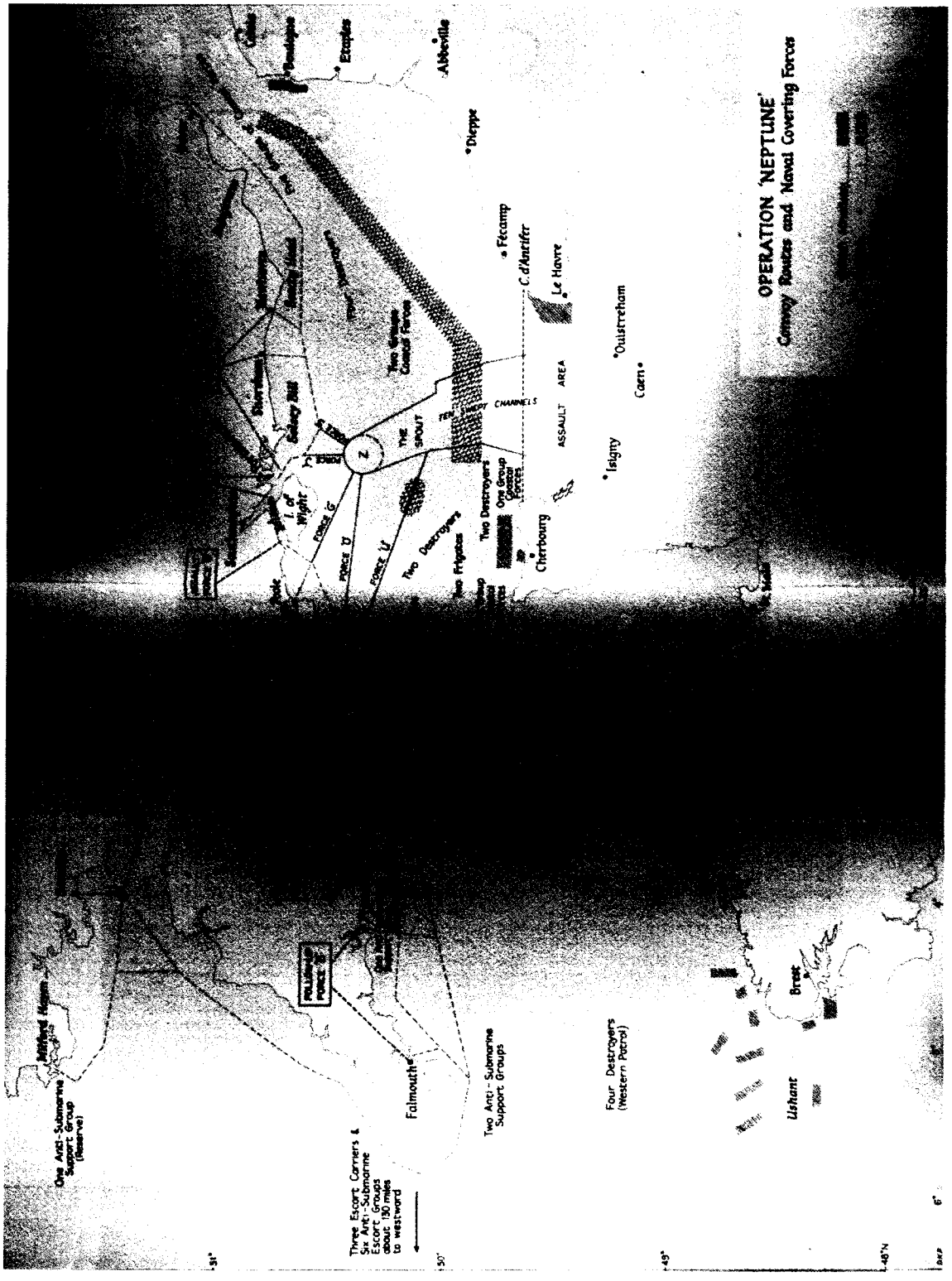


Figure # 1. *Operation Neptune's Convoy Routes and Naval Covering Forces.*
Source: L.F. Ellis, *Victory in the West, vol I. The Battle of Normandy* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1962), 136-137.

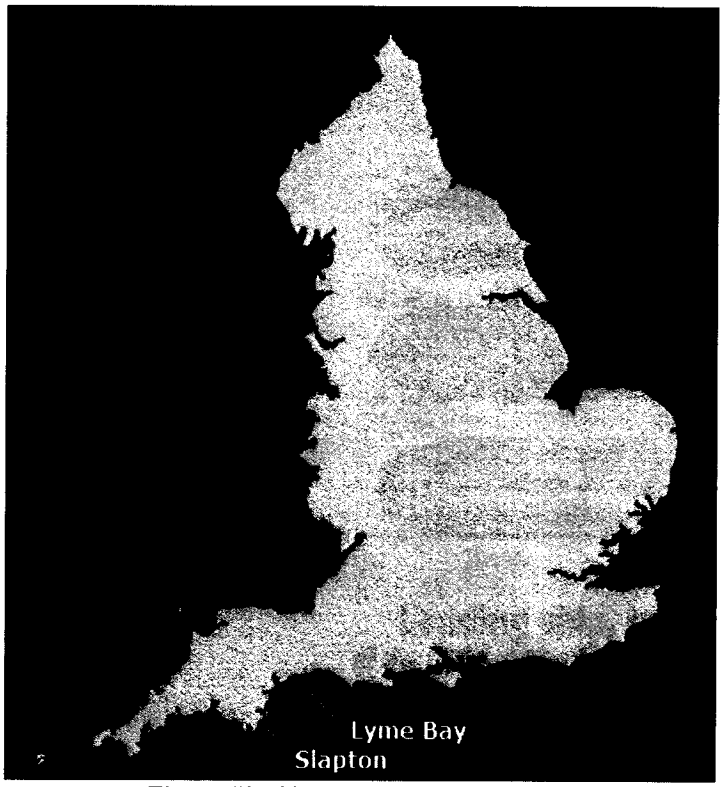


Figure #2. Slapton Sands & Lyme Bay
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exercise_Tiger.

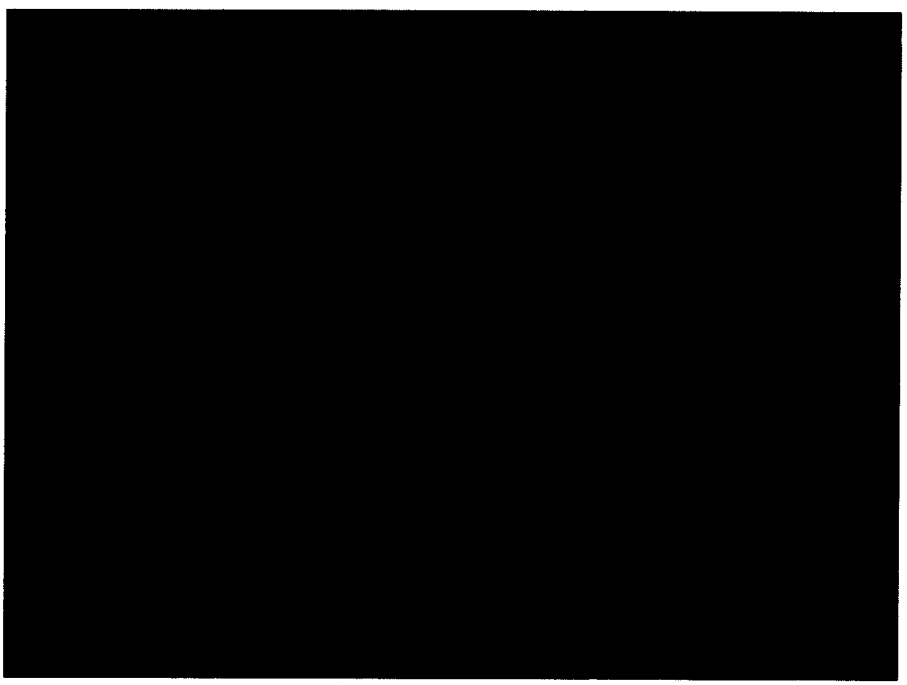
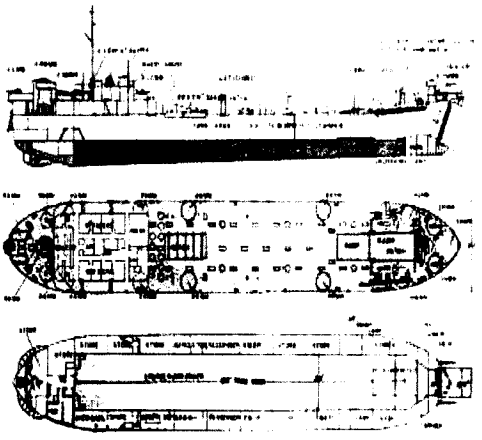


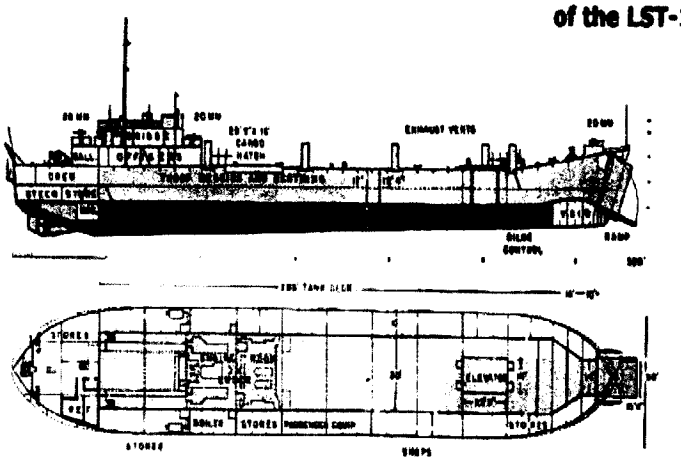
Figure #3. E-boat attack
Source: http://www.combinedops.com/Op_Tiger.htm.

Navsource page prepared by: CTRC Donald J. Wagner, USN (Ret.)



The TYPE II LST Design became the United Nations standard for the Landing ship, tank. Vessels were ocean-going ships designed to land tanks and tracked or wheeled vehicles over a low bow ramp from the tank deck. Vehicles transported on main deck were lowered to tank deck through a forward hatch serviced by a ramp or, (in the case of early LSTs), an elevator. Landing craft tank (LCT) transported on main deck was simply launched over the side by ballasting.

Landing ship, tank (LST)
of the LST-1, LST-491 and LST-542 Classes



The TYPE II LST hull and features were suitable for roles to launch observation aircraft; evacuate wounded from beaches and to act as tenders. Some of these LSTs were converted and re-designated as:
Auxiliary cargo, stores (AKS)
Auxiliary general, petrol boat tender (AGP)
Auxiliary repair, battle damage (ARB)
Auxiliary repair, salvage (ARS)
Auxiliary repair, aircraft (ARV(A) & ARV(E))
Landing ship tank, hospital (LST(H))

Figure #4. Type II Diagram
Source: http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/16000001.htm.

LST	Class	Laid Down	Place	Company	Launched	Commissioned	Armament *
58	LST-1 Class	31 October 1943	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	Dravo Corporation	11 December 1943	22 January 1944	1 single- 3"/50 gun mount 5- 40mm gun mounts 6- 20mm gun mounts 2 -.50-cal machine guns 4- .30-cal machine guns
289	LST-1 Class	14 September 1943	Ambridge, Pennsylvania	American Bridge Company	21 November 1943	31 December 1943	*2 - Twin 40MM gun mounts w/Mk. 51 directors 4 - Single 40MM gun mounts 12 single 20MM gun mounts
496	LST-491 Class	24 August 1943	Evansville, Indiana	Missouri Valley Bridge & Iron Co	22 October 1943	27 December 1943	1 single- 3"/50 gun mount 5- 40mm gun mounts 6- 20mm gun mounts 2 -.50-cal machine guns 4- .30-cal machine guns
499	LST-491 Class	3 September 1943	Evansville, Indiana	Missouri Valley Bridge & Iron Company	5 November 1943	10 January 1944	5- 40mm gun mounts 6- 20mm gun mounts 2- .50-cal machine guns 4- .30-cal machine guns
507	LST-1 Class	8 September 1943	Jeffersonville, Indiana	Jefferson Boat & Machine Company	16 November 1943	10 January 1944	*2 - Twin 40MM gun mounts w/Mk. 51 directors 4 - Single 40MM gun mounts 12 single 20MM gun mounts
511	LST-491 Class	22 July 1943	Seneca, Illinois	Chicago Bridge & Iron Company	30 November 1943	3 January 1944	*2 - Twin 40MM gun mounts w/Mk. 51 directors 4 - Single 40MM gun mounts 12 single 20MM gun mounts
515	LST-511 Class	3 September 1943	Seneca, Illinois	Chicago Bridge & Iron Company	31 December 1943	28 January 1944	*2 - Twin 40MM gun mounts w/Mk. 51 directors 4 - Single 40MM gun mounts 12 single 20MM gun mounts
531	LST-511 Class	22 September 1943	Evansville, Indiana	Missouri Valley & Iron Company	24 November 1943	17 January 1944	5- 40mm gun mounts 6- 20mm gun mounts 2- .50-cal machine guns 4- .30-cal machine guns

"Armament varied with availability when each vessel was outfitted. Retro-fitting was accomplished throughout WWII. The ultimate armament design for United States vessels was 2 - Twin 40MM gun mounts w/Mk. 51 directors, 4 - Single 40MM gun mounts, and 12 single 20MM gun mounts."

Figure #5. Chart of Convoy T-4
Source: http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/16/16idx.htm; Also see Landing Ship Tanks at Naval Historical Center website.

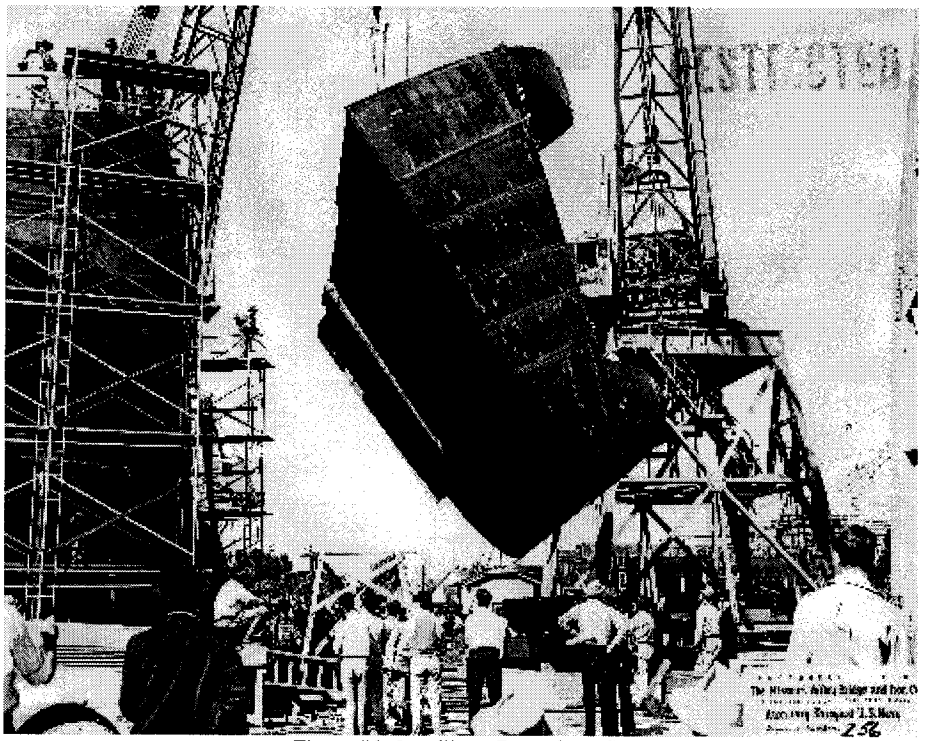


Figure #6. Installing a Bow of an LST
Source: http://www.emuseum.org/virtual_museum/evansville.shipyard/shipyardimg8.html.

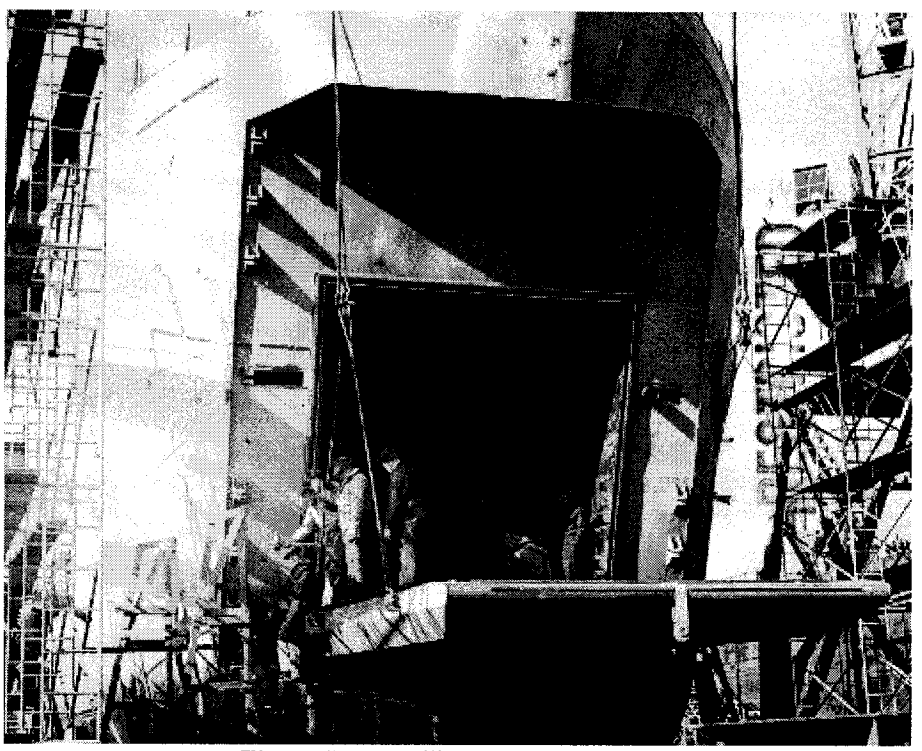


Figure #7. Installing a Ramp of an LST
Source: http://www.emuseum.org/virtual_museum/evansville.shipyard/shipyardimg10.html.

	Heligoland Bight Ports	Den Helder to Dieppe	Le Havre	Seine Bay	Cherbourg and Channel Islands	Channel Islands to Brest	Biscay Ports
U-Boats	--	--	--	--	--	20	35
DD's	--	--	1	--	--	--	5
Torpedo Boats	--	--	4	--	--	--	--
E-Boats	--	30	--	--	17	--	--
R-Boats	10	55	--	5	--	--	--
"M" Class M/S	20	20	1	--	3	15	50
German LCG's	4	30	7	8	3	--	--
Spernbrechers	8	3	--	--	--	8	15
M/S Trawlers	--	30	10	12	--	--	--
Patrol Vessels	--	4	8	20	--	--	--
Harbor Defense Craft	10	15	--	45	--	--	--

Figure #8. The disposition of German naval forces between the Bight and the Bay of Biscay
Source: United States Naval Administration in World War II: Operation Neptune, vol. 5, *The Invasion of Normandy*, (unpublished, 1948), 248.

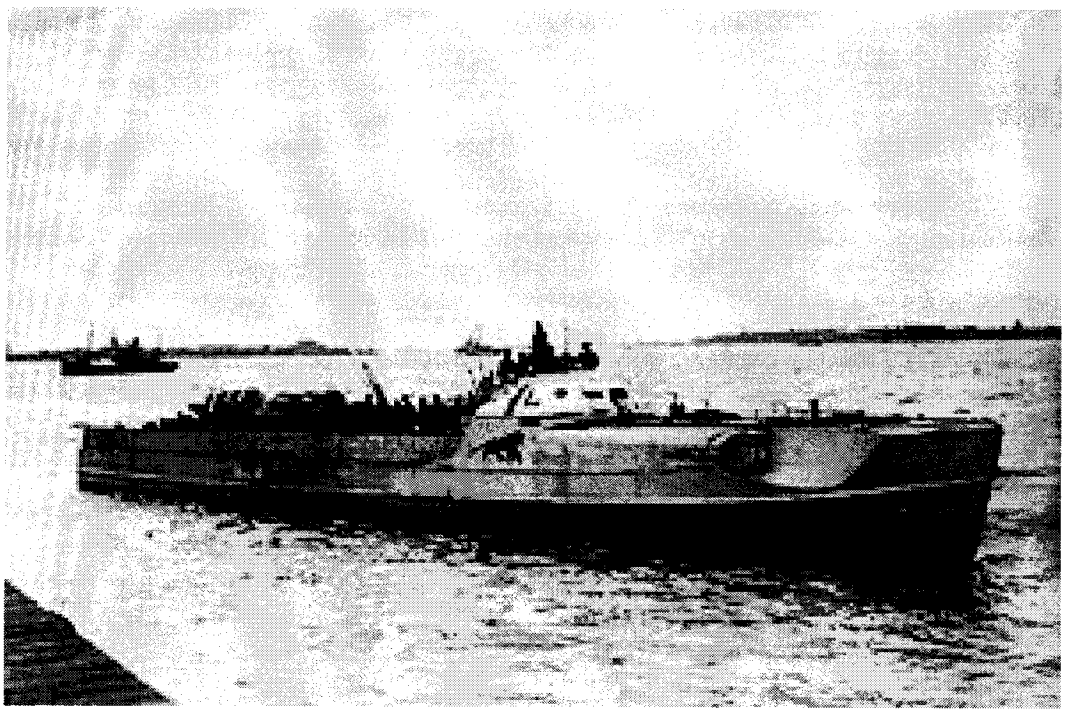


Figure #9. A German E-boat
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-boat.

Chapter II

The E-boat Attack

Ewell Lunsford: "We pulled maneuvers there in England. One was Operation Tiger. We went out one week in a convoy of seven [eight] ships out in the English Channel and were torpedoed by German E-boats. The whole end was knocked off the ship that I was on, and I was down in the hold with the vehicles and gasoline and ammunition, and just packed in there. I heard one torpedo come sliding down the side of the hull of the ship, and it didn't explode, and then the next one caught the stern end of it and tore off about thirty feet all the way across the end. It was just like a big door back there. But we stayed on top and didn't sink. I managed to get topside. Tracer bullets were just as thick as hair on a dog's back. I saw one of those little E-boats in this moonlit night. I could see it coming down alongside of the ship, and the guys were firing on it, and I saw him hit one ship along the port side and it just broke in two and went down in three minutes. Everything in it went down with it. This was right off of the southern coast of England. We were pulling a mock maneuver in preparation for D-Day.[58]

"We crossed the convoy route without any sign of ships," recalls Rabe, "and cruised easterly in the inner bay. Shortly before 0200 on the twenty-eighth we saw in the southeast indistinct shadows of a long line of ships that we did not immediately identify as LSTs [landing ship tank]. We thought at first they were tankers, or possibly destroyers." Slowing momentarily to ten knots, each Eboat launched two torpedoes. The first ones hit nothing—which the German officers took to mean that their prey were shallow—draft vessels that the torpedoes had passed under. . . . Rabe then launched two more torpedoes, aiming at the last ship in the convoy. He learned later that another commander had done the same. "At 0207," he says, "we saw that we had hit the target. Fire was spreading from bow to stern rapidly, and a dense cloud of smoke rose from the ship."[59]

The following chapter is based upon the war diaries and action reports from the LSTs involved in the E-boat attack of 28 April 1944. The perspectives and accounts of the men on each LST differed slightly. The war diaries and action reports from each of the eight LSTs nevertheless revealed the confused events that transpired throughout that disastrous night.

The convoy was initially split into two groups. The Plymouth group, which sailed from Plymouth at 9:45 a.m. on 27 April 1944, consisted of LSTs 515, 496, 511, and 531. At 7:30 p.m., LSTs 499, 289, and 507, the Brixham group, joined the Plymouth LSTs,

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[58] Ronald J. Drez, *Voices of D-Day* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 33.
[59] Quoted in Green and Allen, "What Happened."

already several hours at sea, and formed Convoy T-4.[60] T-4 steamed in column alignment: the British escort (H.M.S. *Azalea*), LST 515 (command ship), LST 496, LST 511, LST 531, LST 58 (towing two pontoon causeways), LST 499, LST 289, and LST 507. The assigned speed was approximately five knots, but once the convoy united at 7:30 p.m., the speed increased to six knots.[61] The column of LSTs proceeded on their assigned course; they would head out into Lyme Bay in an easterly direction and then, after several hours at sea, swing westward toward Slapton Sands. The purpose of this movement was to simulate the time the convoy would actually be at sea once it departed for the actual Normandy invasion.

At 12:11 a.m., H.M.S. *Onslow*, one of the ships patrolling off the Bill of Portland, made contact with an E-boat headed on a northerly course, which then minutes later changed course toward the south. Around 12:20 a.m., Plymouth charted three groups of E-boats between ten and twenty miles west/southwest of Portland Bill, traveling northwest, and searching to the northwestward. The three E-boat groups were also plotted at Portland, but, according to Plymouth headquarters, "the Portland plot was rather confused."[62] *Onslow* sent a report of the threatening E-boat activity to Plymouth headquarters. Plymouth rebroadcast *Onslow*'s warnings on the area broadcast at 12:39 a.m. Plymouth also received the Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth's reported E-boat plot (Portsmouth reported 2 groups of E-boats southwest of Portland Bill at 12:07 a.m.) at 12:39 a.m. Plymouth received its first unidentified radar plot from shore stations at 12:22

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[60] Commanding Officer LST 507 to The Secretary of the Navy, Loss of Ship, Report of, 2 May 1944, AOR RG 38. LST action reports indicated that the attack occurred at 50°29′N 2°52′W.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Excerpt from Plymouth Command, Diary of Events, 0001-2400, 28 April 1944, AOR RG 38.

a.m., which was later classified as hostile around 12:25 a.m. Plymouth broadcast the ominous information on both the area broadcast and the Plymouth Port Wave, which Plymouth assumed the escort (correctly) and the LSTs (incorrectly) were monitoring.[63] Convoy T-4, blissfully unaware of the events taking place to the south, was heading directly into the mouths of an E-boat attack.

LST 507 was the rear ship of Convoy T-4. Lieutenant J. F. Murdock, who survived the E-boat attack, authored his ship's report for the events that transpired that night. After changing course twice, LST 507's crew heard gunfire, observed tracers coming from the port quarter at 1:35 a.m., and immediately went to general quarters. Although the ship observed gunfire and tracers, LST 507's witnesses could not determine the source or the direction of the firing. After going to general quarters, the crew continued to hear sporadic firing from unknown sources. Finally, at 2:04 a.m., a torpedo struck LST 507's auxiliary engine room, the ship's engine failed, and the ship burst into flames. The crew attempted to extinguish the fire, but most of the equipment no longer worked because of power failure, or, because of the fires, the crew could not reach vital equipment. The crew did its best, but was unable to stop the fires. Murdock stated that he abandoned ship between 2:40 and 2:45 a.m., along with the then commanding officer, Lt. J. S. Swarts, who did not survive the attack. The command to abandon ship, Murdock believed, came ten minutes prior to his and the commanding officer's departure into the water.[64]

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Commanding Officer LST 507 to The Secretary of the Navy, Loss of Ship, Report of, 2 May 1944, AOR RG 38.

LST 289, the ship directly ahead of LST 507, was the E-boats' third and last victim. Lieutenant Harry A. Mettler, commanding officer of LST 289, stated that the convoy was in formation on its designated course until the ship observed white flares several miles away on the starboard bow. At 1:00 a.m., the convoy changed course. Four minutes later there were two slight jars thirty seconds apart, similar to the effect of depth charges. At 1:30 a.m., LST 289 observed gunfire directed toward LST 507, about 600 yards astern of LST 289. Lt. Mettler was in the super conn at the time of the attack. After the officer on deck proceeded to his battle station, Mettler took over the super conn. Mettler and his gunnery officer believed that the gunfire came from 40mm guns at a distance of 2500 to 4000 yards, almost due west, but no one could clearly identify the source. The fire came almost directly from the direction of the moon, which at the time he reported as very low.[65]

Suddenly the action accelerated as LST 507 sheered to LST 289's port and proceeded ahead of the ship. Now, the gunfire abruptly shifted toward LST 289, although most of the gunfire reportedly arched over the ship. Since LST 289's lookouts could not determine the source of the gunfire, attempts to return fire were hopeless. Mettler reasoned that if he did fire without determining the position of the enemy, then his position would be given away, as well as that of the convoy. Moreover, the ship and the convoy had been given explicit instructions not to fire unless the enemy was in clear view. The firing lasted about ten minutes and the ship did not receive any hits, despite being targeted by an estimated two or three hundred rounds. Once the gunfire stopped,

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[65] From The Commanding Officer to The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Navy, Report of Action and Damage, 2 May 1944, AOR RG 38.

LST 507 returned to formation about seven hundred yards astern of LST 289. At 2:03 a.m., however, a torpedo smashed into LST 507. At this point, LST 499 sailed to the port side of LST 58 and the ships, along with LST 289, quickly sailed to port. Mettler stated that he was responsible for the lives of the men on board the ship, both army and navy, so he decided against going to the assistance of the stricken LST 507.[66]

By this time the entire convoy had scattered. When LST 531 exploded around 2:19 a.m., LST 289 could not identify the burning ship because the convoy was so disordered. To avoid torpedoes, LST 289 began running at emergency flank speed using the right and left full rudder at four to five minute intervals. Men on the ship's deck later reported that two torpedo wakes passed astern off their starboard quarter and another across their port bow. The action intensified at 2:28 a.m. "Four port 40s and three 20s opened fire at an object in the water described as a fast white boat similar to the British ML series."[67] At the same time, other crew members fired at a torpedo wake coming directly toward the stern of the ship; the wake was approximately one hundred yards out.[68]

Once the crew noticed the deadly torpedo, they attempted full left rudder, but it was too late. The ship was still carrying out the previous order of full right rudder, therefore, the crew could not complete the command and the rudder returned to full right. Mettler judged that the torpedo was traveling at a speed of fifteen to twenty knots, but believed it would miss the ship. When the torpedo exploded with a tremendous "flash

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.

and roar" Mettler did not think his ship was badly hit; the torpedo struck the LST's hull at a point that was so high that the screws were undamaged. The starboard stern 40 gun tub was blown back and the whole stern section of the deck house curled over. The engines stopped for three minutes. Fire did break out but remained under control and was effectively extinguished. Once the engines restarted, the crew realized that they could attempt to head to the nearest port. In order to do so, however, the ship made a circle between the burning LSTs 507 and 531. Eventually after several hours of struggle, LST 289 arrived in Dartmouth, England, at 2:45 p.m.[69]

LST 499 was the third ship ahead of LSTs 507 and 289. About 11:40 p.m., LST 499's crew observed several flares on the horizon. At this time the Americans saw two white flares at a considerable distance from the convoy, which were then followed by two white flares at 12:20 a.m., and then immediately followed by an estimated fifteen to twenty white flares.[70] The men observed more white flares again at 1:14 a.m. An unexpected vibration, described by the crew as a vibration that felt similar to that of a depth charge, occurred at 1:20 a.m., and then another at 1:23 a.m.[71]

At 1:38 a.m. an "unidentified craft" (E-boat) fired on the convoy. Lookouts on LST 499 noted that the gunfire seemed to originate from an "invisible craft" to starboard. The crew immediately went to general quarters. Red and green tracers soon began arching over the confused convoy. The "dropping off" effect from the trajectory of the tracers indicated that they came from a considerable distance. According to LST 499's

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[69] Ibid.
[70] U.S.S. LST 499, Action Report, 27 April 1944, AOR RG 38.
[71] Ibid.

account, the gunfire lasted about four minutes. After the gunfire stopped, LST 289 moved up to within about 300 yards of LST 499's stern and LST 507 returned back to its original position. Since no message came from Commander Skahill, on board LST 515, and since no action had taken place for twenty minutes following the initial gunfire, LST 499 assumed that the fire was part of the exercise.[72]

Action began again at 2:03 a.m., when LST 507 burst into flames. At the same time, LST 499 lookouts observed a torpedo wake approaching at 100 to 150 feet. The ship immediately applied full left rudder and all engines full ahead. The torpedo missed the bow of the ship by about twenty feet. LST 499 turned on its radar following the torpedo strike of LST 507, but could not identify any suspicious vessels. While all of these events took place, the ships ahead of LST 499 began changing their course and LST 499 followed her sister ships until she was off LST 58's port side. At 2:11 a.m., the ship changed to standard speed, and then to one-third speed at 2:16 a.m. Amidst the chaos, LST 499 expected to hear orders from the command ship, LST 515, but none came.[73]

Around 2:19 a.m., lookouts on LST 499 witnessed LST 531 skirmishing with an "invisible craft." About a minute later a tremendous explosion, followed by another, came from 531 as two torpedoes hit the ship; 531 continued to fire on the enemy a few seconds after being torpedoed. Then the men on 499 heard a second explosion during this brief exchange and the 531's stern erupted into flames. LST 499 changed course and went to full speed ahead and scattered with its sister ships. Following the attack on LST 531, 499 spotted a fast moving, slender, light gray craft to 531's starboard at an estimated

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[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.

distance of two miles. They thought that it could have been the convoy's escort. At 2:25 a.m., while heading toward the nearest port, LST 499 sent out a distress message.

> SSSS SSSS SSSS SSSS 3WYX V 3PQP 2800240 BT SUBMARINE ATTACK BT 2800240 K [74]

Around 3:15 a.m. 499's radar showed a number of ships returning to formation and heading toward the Bill of Portland. LST 499's commanding officer altered the ship's course to rejoin the remaining ships. The ship's lookouts observed many white flares to the south while the ship altered its course. Although 499's radar identified a ship twelve miles away in the same direction of the flares, the commanding officer noted that he did not know the general direction of the flares.[75]

John E. Wachter, commanding officer of LST 58, completed his action report on 3 May 1944. On 27 April 1944, LST 58 left Plymouth towing two pontoon causeways that were 187 feet long. Wachter noted that the sea was calm, the wind moderate, the moon rose at 10:21p.m., and the visibility was good. The ship reported that the sun finally set on convoy T-4 at 9:27 p.m. At 11:52 p.m., the ship sighted white flares at an estimated range of seven miles. Again at 12:20 a.m., the ship observed two white flares about the same distance. From sunset onward the commanding officer warned the crew to be on the lookout for torpedo wakes and other possible indications of German activity. The crew searched with radar and manned the ship's guns but was unable to locate any enemy ships within the area.[76]

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[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] LST 58, The Commanding Officer to The Commanding-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet, 3 May 1944, AOR RG 38; The Executive Officer to The Commanding Officer, Action Report, 3 May 1944, AOR RG 38.

At 1:33 a.m., lookouts sighted gunfire directed toward the convoy. Wachter believed that the inaccurate German fire came from anti-aircraft mounts in an attempt to draw return fire from the convoy so that the Germans could locate their prey. The crew of LST 58 went to general quarters at 1:33 a.m. Some of the fire directed at the convoy passed over the ship and struck the water on its port side at a distance of 400 to 600 yards. But Wachter, like Mettler, did not give the command to open fire at an unseen enemy because of the possibility of giving away the ship and the convoy's position.[77]

At 2:02 a.m., at the same time the convoy changed its course, the crew of LST 58 heard an explosion astern and noticed flames from the rear ship in the convoy, LST 507. About the same time a torpedo struck LST 507, LST 499 sheared to port and moved toward the port beam about 300 yards from LST 58 in order to evade an oncoming torpedo. In spite of all of these events—towing the pontoon causeway, the sudden move from LST 499, LST 507 in flames, and gunfire now presumed to be coming from German E-boats—Wachter decided that it would be best to avoid maneuver and stay in line with the remaining ships of the convoy.[78]

Events took a drastic change for LST 58 following the attacks on LST 531 (2:17 a.m.) and LST 289 (2:37 a.m.). At 2:15 a.m., LST 531 opened fire on the enemy, though, at this time LST 58 still had not identified a target. At 2:17 a.m., about 400 yards ahead of LST 58, LST 531 erupted into flames. Wachter believed that staying in formation was no longer wise. Because of the convoy's confusion and owing to attacks coming from all sides, the ships individually began to scatter in zigzag movements in various directions.

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[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

LST 58 changed course and speed quickly through the convoy to avoid the fires from the torpedo explosions and the E-boats heard approaching on its starboard side. Eventually the commanding officer ordered all engines ahead at emergency flank speed.[79]

LST 58's night, though, was far from over. The crew again heard an E-boat motor on its port beam at 2:24 a.m. The ship moved in a manner that positioned the sound of the motors between LST 531's fire and LST 58. Suddenly, one minute later, the ship spotted an E-boat headed directly for the ship. Four 40mm and six 20mm guns fired on the approaching E-boat at a range of about 1500 yards; the last shot reportedly fired at an estimated 2000 yards, but to no avail. The E-boat turned away and disappeared in the night. At about 2:30 a.m., the ship heard another explosion astern (LST 289). A searchlight appeared off LST 58's port quarter, but was turned off a few seconds later. Ensign H. M. Turner, at 2:37 a.m., spotted a torpedo that passed the bow very close to the water's surface. LST 58 used full rudder movements to present the smallest possible target for the enemy. Finally, to increase the ship's speed, the commanding officer ordered the LST to cut loose the pontoon causeways.[80]

The E-boats continued to hound LST 58. From 2:37 a.m. until 4:00 a.m., bright magnesium flares illuminated the sky in every direction. The commanding officer believed the enemy used the flares to prevent the LSTs from escaping directly toward the nearest shore. To get to Chesil Cove, West Bay, Portland, England, the ship moved in an eastward direction to avoid the various flares. At 3:02 a.m., the ship briefly sighted an E-boat about 1 ½ to two miles away. At the same time, the ship reported the sound of

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[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.

motors off its port quarter. The sound of motor noises continued from both bow and stern.[81] LST 58 employed the following tactics:

> During this period of maneuvering the tactics of the E-Boats appeared to be as follows: Flares would be seen on our port quarter or port bow; noise from motors would be heard on a reciprocal bearing (this was identified as noise from powerful motors of fast moving craft presumed to be E-boats) indicating that there were at least 2 E-Boats in the vicinity. This necessitated maneuvering with the objective of keeping both flares and motors astern of us rather than broadside to.[82]

Eventually LST 58 made it to Portland at 4:47 a.m.[83]

Directly ahead of LST 58 was LST 531. Ensign Douglas G. Harlander, the senior survivor from LST 531, wrote his ship's action report. At approximately 10:22 p.m., and then again at 12:29 a.m., the convoy changed its course in order to simulate the time that they would actually be at sea once the Normandy invasion began. General quarters sounded at 1:30 a.m., after Harlander arrived on the bridge and the crew informed him that they heard gunfire and had seen tracers from unknown sources. Harlander, though, reported that he did not see the tracers nor did he hear the reported gunfire. He was informed the gunfire came from the direction of the ship's stern, but was not directed at his ship. The firing, Harlander believed, did not last more than a minute. Therefore, at 1:50 a.m., the ship secured from general quarters.[84]

At 2:03 a.m., action began again. At this point the officer of the deck called the watch and ordered him to log an underwater explosion. A minute later, LST 531 reported that a ship in the distance was on fire off the ship's starboard quarter. Harlander witnessed the fire, but became puzzled over the burning ship's identity. Just as he

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[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] From Commanding Officer LST 531 to The Secretary of the Navy, Lost of Ship, report on, 2 May 1944, AOR RG 38.

determined that the object on fire was another LST, a German torpedo struck LST 531's starboard side, and then, just a minute later, another. The first torpedo hit in the middle of the ship, while the second torpedo struck in the vicinity of the number three boat. Fire quickly consumed the LST. Because of the tremendous impact of the torpedo, the electric power quickly failed, leaving the ship lifeless in the water. The crew attempted to fight the fire but was unable to control the flames. Finally, at approximately 2:24 a.m., the LST began to sink and Harlander gave the command to abandon ship. He estimated that there were only fifteen men on board the ship at the time he gave this command. All others had either died or had already gone overboard.[85] Most of the American casualties came from LST 531.

LST 511 left Falmouth, England, heading toward Plymouth, England to take part in Exercise Tiger. At 1:00 a.m., Lieutenant J. Yacevich reported that Convoy T-4 was traveling at four knots, with the two escorts, HMS *Scimitar* and *Azalea*; 511 was unaware that the convoy traveled with only one escort. LST 511 reported that it was a clear night, the sea was calm and visibility was 15,000 yards. Then at 1:14 a.m., LST 511 reported two white flares at a distance of two miles. At 1:35 a.m., the ship described the sound of artillery fire coming from astern; the fire confused LST 511, but because of no word from the command ship, LST 515, LST 511 assumed the firing was part of Exercise Tiger. At 2:05 a.m., lookouts spotted the torpedoing of LST 507. Three minutes later, LST 511 sounded general quarters. At 2:19 a.m., the ship witnessed an unidentified object 600

[85] Ibid.

yards off its starboard beam. Two minutes later two E-boat torpedoes tore into LST 531.[86]

Between 2:22-2:24 a.m., after the attack on LST 531, LSTs 515 and 496 fired upon an "unidentified target" that, according to four witnesses, sliced between LST 496 and LST 511. Obviously the "unidentified target" was one of the nine German E-boats. The E-boat, moving at approximately 40 knots, fired at an upward angle toward LST 511. Amidst the confusion LST 496 fired accidentally on 511, causing some casualties. The gunfire lasted approximately two minutes. At 2:24 a.m., an E-boat torpedo smashed into LST 289. Finally, after the attack was well underway, Yacevich gave orders to head for the Bill of Portland. En route, LST 511 observed one to five red or white flare rockets at about three-minute interval, that drew steadily closer to the ship until, eventually, the last flare revealed the approaching English coast.[87]

The men on board LST 511 gave a detailed summary of the events that transpired that night. They heard the German E-boats' loud motors, but at first mistook them for airplanes. Eventually, after they realized that they were E-boats, the crew noted that a German E-boat approached Convoy T-4 at a speed of an estimated forty knots passing directly in front of their ship at no more than fifteen yards. The E-boat made two sharp turns and then quickly disappeared. Although they heard the "muffling" sound of the boat, they were unable to catch a clear view of the enemy craft. The men only heard the firing that came from the unidentified boat and witnessed the green flares released by the

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[86] From the Commanding Officer to The Commander in Chief, U.S. Navy, Report of Action Taking Place Morning of 28 April 1944, 30 April 1944, AOR RG 38; U.S.S. LST 511 War Diary for Month of April 1944, WD RG 38.
[87] Ibid.

E-boats. LST 511's lookouts wrongly believed that German submarines aided the E-boats in the attack. LST 511 claimed that because "the flare rockets could not be determined on the radar screen, it is likely that they were fired by a submerged submarine."[88] Because German submarines could report the enemy's location to other ships and because the E-boats had a relative easy time locating the LSTs, LST 511 supposed that German submarines were the eyes and ears for the German E-boats.[89]

Commanding officer S. H. Koch authored the action report for LST 496, the second ship in the convoy column. At 1:35 a.m., after traveling through the English waters for several hours, LST 496 observed anti-surface firing coming from the starboard battery of LST 507. The crew went to general quarters, but the ship's radar was unable to pick up any targets. At 2:15 a.m., LST 496's lookouts noted the torpedoing of LST 507. The convoy, though, with no orders from Commander Skahill, continued to maintain course and speed.[90]

Around 2:18 a.m., an unidentified LST opened fire with its starboard battery on an unspecified target. The "unidentified ship" (E-boat) returned fire with blue tracers. Three minutes later, following this brief engagement, the lookouts observed the torpedoing of LSTs 289 and 531. LST 496's action report stated that at this time the ship "made a 090 degree turn to port, went ahead flank, and gave the order to open fire on a target that appeared on the radar screen, which the ship reported as about one and one-

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[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] From The Commanding Officer to The Commander in Chief, U.S. Navy, Report of Action Taking Place Morning Of 28 April 1944, 30 April 1944, AOR RG 38; U.S.S. LST 496 War Diary for Month of April 1944, WD RG 38.

quarter miles."[91] After firing upon the target, Koch ordered a cease fire and the ship proceeded to zigzagging movements, attempting to present its stern to the enemy. Finally at 2:25 a.m., the ship radioed Plymouth command and informed the headquarters that the convoy was under E-boat attack. They were only sixteen miles from the Bill of Portland. At 2:28 a.m., after radioing Plymouth, LST 496 began firing on an E-boat spotted off its starboard beam. Once again, after the brief incident with the E-boat, Koch ordered a cease fire and instructed the crew to begin evasive tactics toward the nearest port. While proceeding toward the Bill of Portland, the ship radioed Plymouth a final time about the attack.[92]

The reports of Lieutenant John Doyle, captain of LST 515, and Commander Skahill, who used LST 515 as his flag ship, summarized the events that occurred on 28 April 1944. Beginning a little after midnight on the 28 April, the ship spotted white and green flares at various distances from the convoy, but, just as the other LSTs reported, Skahill could not determine their origins. Around 1:35 a.m., the ship heard the sound of gunfire and saw tracers at the rear of the convoy. Initially, Skahill, thinking it was part of the Exercise Tiger operation, believed that the gunfire came from the English coast, a belief reinforced by the fact that no reports had come from Plymouth regarding enemy activity in the area. Skahill concluded that the gunfire was not directed toward the convoy.[93]

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[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Commander LST Group 32, Commander Task Unit 125.11.4, Action Report, 3 May 1944, AOR RG 38; Enclosure A, United States Ship LST 515, Report of, Friday 28 1944, AOR RG 38.

At 2:04 a.m., LST 515's lookouts noticed that a ship was on fire, although Skahill was unaware that the vessel was part of his convoy. The burning vessel seemed so far away; the convoy had received no messages from Plymouth headquarters; and the escort vessel, HMS *Azalea,* maintained its position at the head of the convoy. Around 1:42 a.m., LST 515's radar revealed small "pips" to starboard.[94] At 2:18 a.m., following the attacks on LST 507 and LST 531, two E-boats passed through the convoy between "the third and fourth and the fourth and fifth ships from starboard to port."[95] Several LSTs fired on the vessels, but could not determine if they damaged the enemy craft. Several minutes later, 515 fired at an E-boat, but again was unable to determine if the enemy had taken any damage. Following the latest encounter with the enemy, and based on radar contacts, presumed to be E-boats, Skahill determined that it was no longer safe to remain in contact with the enemy. He decided to order evasive tactics. Therefore, at 2:32 a.m., roughly thirty minutes after the initial attack on LST 507, Skahill radioed to Portland that the convoy was under attack. Between 2:30 and 3:30 a.m., while attempting to head toward the nearest port, LST 515 observed well over twenty E-boat white flares, employed to hinder the convoy's escape.[96] Finally, "at 6:25 A.M., Commander Skahill informed Admiral Moon that two ships had been torpedoed and that he was searching for survivors. This report, four hours after the event, was the first news Admiral Moon had of the attack."[97]

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[94] Ibid.
[95] LST 515, Enclosure A, The Commanding Officer to The Commander in Chief, Action, 28 April 1944, report of, 3 May 1944, AOR RG 38.
[96] Hoyt, *Invasion*, 115.
[97] Ibid.

The report stated that "no reports had been or were received of enemy craft in the area."[98] Within this profound statement lies the problem that the LSTs faced that night. The LSTs were unaware of any imposing dangers because they were not on the same communication frequency (Plymouth Port Wave frequency) with the British headquarters or their escort. LST 515, as well as the other LSTs, claimed that the German E-boats used "flashless powder" and "shells whose tracers did not commence to burn until well after the shell had left the muzzle." The German E-boats' tactics helped the E-boats evade easy detection. Once Skahill believed that the attack was over, he and his ship returned to the scene and picked up survivors. LST 515, with U.S.S. *Tide,* H.M.S *Dianthus,* and H.M.S. *Primrose*, arrived at the scene at 4:42 a.m., more than two hours after the skirmish, and picked up the remaining survivors.[99]

Following the attack, Commander Skahill and the commanding officers of the various LSTs developed a list of certain recommendations to prevent such an attack from occurring again. The report concluded by recommending that a better, larger escort was necessary for future operations. Another recommendation was that important communications about enemy contacts be established to ensure the safety of future operations.[100] Moreover, the commanding officers demanded that "vital information on enemy contacts is disseminated quickly."[101] Also, they believed that a "standard procedure and a special circuit be established in each operation for reporting emergencies

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[98] Commander LST Group 32, Commander Task Unit 125.11.4, Action Report, 3 May 1944, AOR RG 38.
[99] CTF 125 to CIC U.S. Fleet, Action Between LST Convoy and Enemy E Boats, 28 April 1944, report concerning, AOR RG 38.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.

of a tactical nature; also that collective radio calls be assigned for each group of ships acting as a unit."[102]

LST 499's report, as well as other action reports, verified that there was a lack of communication between the convoy and the escort. The lack of information led LST 499 to believe that the flares it had seen prior to the attack were part of the practice operation. After the E-boats' torpedo attacks, LST 499 claimed that there were no instructions given or received. LST 499 also explained that there was no "rendezvous" given in case of an attack. Moreover, LST 499 thought the speed of advance of the convoy was set too low.[103]

Convoy T-4's communication and escort protection were not the only flaws that arose during the E-boat attack. LST 507 faced uncontrollable fires that consumed the ship after the E-boat torpedo smashed into her. Too much fuel on the ship caused the ship to burst into flames; therefore, in case of another attack, Skahill and the officers recommended that future convoys carry limited fuel so they could prevent fires from getting out of control. If a fire did break out, Skahill wished "that a more adequate means of drawing water to fight fires—and dependent entirely on manual operation—be provided for LSTs and other ships carrying highly inflammable cargo."[104]

Through the released reports, there was substantial evidence from survivor accounts that many on board the LSTs were ill-prepared for a cataclysmic incident. Preparing soldiers for all possible scenarios of warfare, regardless of the circumstances,

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[102] Ibid.
[103] U.S.S. LST 499, Report of Action between a Convoy of U.S. LSTs and Unidentified Enemy Vessel or Vessels on the night of April 27, 1944, and Early Morning of April 28, 1944, AOR RG 38.
[104] Commander LST Group 32, Commander Task Unit 125.11.4, Action Report, 3 May 1944, AOR RG 38.

falls on the shoulders of command. Many soldiers on board the LSTs were young, inexperienced, and panicky. They were unaware of the requisite procedures. There were reports of soldiers fully equipped, helmet and all, jumping overboard into the chilling waters.[105] Some inexperienced soldiers did not understand the seriousness of the situation and many jumped into the English waters yelling "dry-run."[106] Others on board were not aware of the proper way to use their life jackets. Instead of inflating their life jackets under their armpits, the men put the life jackets around their waist. As they leaped from the ship into the frigid English waters, their life jackets slipped over their heads, because of improper use, and since they were weighted down by their army gear, they descended beneath the freezing waters.[107] Skahill and his commanding officers found that the lifejackets provided for the convoy were insufficient and cost many lives in the E-boat attack. H.M.S. *Saladin,* one of the rescue ships, found

> most of the corpses seen in the water appeared to be uninjured and were wearing inflatable lifebelts. It is the opinion of this ship that many unnecessary casualties were caused by troops wearing their lifebelts too low down on the stomach- instead of well up under the armpits- thereby tipping them forward with their faces in the water.[108]

The waters that night were a chilling forty-two degrees Fahrenheit.[109] Accounts claimed that many of the soldiers broke their necks because they dove into the water head first.[110] On board Convoy T-4 were young soldiers who had never experienced combat. Several

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[105] Tent, *E-boat*, 16.
[106] Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 88; Hoyt, *Invasion*, 112.
[107] H.M.S. Saladin, Report of Proceedings E-Boat Attack on Convoy T-4- Exercise Tiger, 29 April 1944, AOR RG 38.
[108] HMS Saladin, Report of Proceeding, E-boat Attack on Convoy T-4, 29 April 1944, AOR RG 38.
[109] Tent, *E-boat*, 13.
[110] Ibid.,16-17.

of these young men did not receive the proper training that was vital on the 28 April 1944.[111]

From the number of dead bodies found in the water, Skahill concluded that the kapok jacket was more efficient for maintaining exhausted swimmers above the water than the Mae West life jacket. The Mae West life jacket was 27.5'' by 12.75'' by 1.25'', of khaki color, made of cotton material with inflatable rubber bladders, and contained a CO^2 cartridge that inflated the life preserver. Heavy shoes also became another burden for the soldiers trying to stay afloat in the water. Following interviews with survivors, Skahill concluded that "where abandoning ship is possibility personnel wearing heavy shoes be indoctrinated to loosen shoe laces so that shoes may be quickly removed if necessary."[112] This recommendation was illogical. If shoes were removed then they may have prevented a soldier from drowning, but hypothermia would quickly follow. Shoes were not the problem; the Mae West lifejacket was.

Furthermore, the Americans had a horrific time releasing the life boats. With the ships packed with American soldiers, the LSTs did not contain enough life boats in case of an attack. The life boats they had on the ships either could not be released because of technical problems, or, if they were released, Americans would overrun them. In the end, only a few lifeboats managed to rescue survivors from the unbearable, freezing sea. Therefore, Skahill asked that life rafts and life boats "should be made as near ready for lowering as gunfire requirements and structural limitations permit."[113]

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[111] Ibid.
[112] Commander LST Group 32, Commander Task Unit 125.11.4, Action Report, 3 May 1944, AOR RG 38.
[113] Ibid.

Skahill made other recommendations as well:

> d) All hands should again be cautioned not to look too long at flares or fires, as it cuts down on ability to see objects in the dark.
>
> f) Rifles and pistols should be made generally available to fire at E boats when they pass close aboard, especially when guns cannot depress sufficiently.
>
> g) A high frequency voice circuit used at low power will materially aid operators of isolated units
>
> i) Illumination rockets- a type of rocket suitable for use by slow moving and large ships like LSTs is recommended for illuminating craft such as "E" boats.[114]

Admiral Moon, designated naval leader for Force U (Utah) and Exercise Tiger's leading officer, also made final conclusions and recommendations following his investigations and inquiries into the E-boat attack. All the LSTs in Convoy T-4 were newly commissioned. The eight LSTs had arrived in Great Britain a month prior to the culmination of Exercise Tiger. Commander Skahill received five of these newly commissioned ships which, combined with the three other LSTs, formed LST Group 32 (Convoy T-4), which had never worked as a complete tactical group prior to Exercise Tiger. Furthermore, all of the commanding officers were "ex-enlisted men with from 12 to 16 years service, or reserve officers with from one to two years active duty."[115]

Regarding escort protection, Moon required that at least four escorts, to cover both the bows and quarters, were vital for the protection of future convoys. He also wished, owing to the threat of future E-boat attacks, that the Allies pursue the E-boats aggressively in order to "remove a serious menace to future operations."[116] Moreover,

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[114] Ibid.
[115] CTF 125 to CIC U.S. Fleet, Action Between LST Convoy and Enemy E Boats, 28 April 1944, report concerning, AOR RG 38.
[116] Ibid.

after the reports of multiple flares seen before the attack, Moon thought that Skahill should have canceled the exercise and increased the convoy's speed.[117]

Additionally, Moon had further recommendations:

23. That increased use of planes to attack E boats be made.
24. That aggressive action by air attacks against enemy E boat bases be made
25. That increased escort in E boat waters during hours of darkness be provided.
26. That provisions be made for an aggressive action to be taken against any E boats at any time entering the radar net. That when an attack appears possible on a convoy, consideration be given to reinforcing it by vessels which though in a station patrol may be close enough to augment the convoy escort.
27. That patrols stationed off the coast instead of being line patrols parallel to the coast be stationed so as to patrol in depth on a line normal to the coast (Note: This is being done)
28. That all escort and assault force communication personnel train in the use of E boat warnings as given in Plymouth Communications Instructions Order 15 and be familiar with the form of the message.
29. That convoy and escort commanders check on means of communications with each other before leaving port or joining up.
30. That the Assault Force Commander be informed in advance of any prospective withdrawals of his escorts from his control.
31. That when fair weather is indicated all except belly gripes be removed from LCVPs on LSTs to permit faster launching in case of torpedo attack.
32. In case of threatened E boat attack, that all boats be ungriped and prepared for launching if the weather so permits.
33. That additional vessels be provided in all convoys for life saving purposes to pick up survivors.
34. Army and Navy personnel be frequently warned as to desirability of wearing life belts high up on their bodies.
35. That fire fighting experts make study of what can be done to limit a fire in combat loaded LSTs with vehicles carrying gasoline. (It might be possible that a fire screen would be of values in limiting the spread of flames in the expanse of the main deck.)
36. Tracers be developed and provided to all U.S. Naval Craft similar to those in use by German E boats
    1) These craft apparently use flashless powder so that the flash cannot be noticed and the tracers apparently do not begin functioning for a considerable distance after being fired—this leaves the E boat undisclosed
    2) U.S. tracers when fired outline the vessel using them, making it an excellent target[118]

The E-boats made it safely back to Cherbourg but not before encounters with various British vessels. Heading southward toward France, E-boats skirmished with

[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.

H.M.S. *Offa* and H.M.S. *Orwell,* but managed to escape at high speed under a smokescreen. An excerpt from the Plymouth command stated:

> Acting on what information was available from Portland Plot, C-in-C Portsmouth sent H.M.Ships STEVENSTONE and SEYMOUR and a force of Portsmouth M.G.B.'s to a position south of the Plymouth destroyer patrols to give added depth to forces disposed to intercept the E-boat withdrawal, but no further contact was made with the enemy by surface ships.
>
> An offensive patrol to intercept the returning E-boats was carried out by Albacore A/C in an area north of Alderney and the Cherbourg Peninsula. At 0345 3 craft, possibly Mowe class T/B's, were attacked 4 miles north of Cap Levi, and about an hour later 1 E-boat was attacked off Cap de la Hague. Both attacks appeared unsuccessful, but at 0502 another attack was made on 3 E-boats in the Race of Alderney and 1 hit claimed.[119]

The patrols intended to block E-boats from escaping Cherbourg attempted to intercept the E-boats before they could safely make it to France. They were unsuccessful in their attempts. Amazingly, the E-boats involved in the attack escaped unscathed and all nine E-boats returned safely to Cherbourg.[120] In their wake, the E-boats sent two vital LSTs to their watery graves, severely damaged a third, left several hundred Americans dead, and the Allies scratching their heads.

Unfortunately for the Americans and Convoy T-4, at 10:00 p.m. on 28 April 1944, British Signal Intelligence (SIGINT) decoded a German naval message stating that nine E-boats had left Cherbourg. F.W. Hinsley's *British Intelligence in the Second World War* explained, "A signal disclosing that nine E-boats were to leave Cherbourg at 2200/27 April for operations to the westward was not decrypted till late 28 April."[121] The newly discovered message was unfortunately almost twenty-four hours too late. It explained that the E-boats' objective was to scout any Allied activity taking place around

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[119] Excerpt From Plymouth Command, Diary of Events, Enemy E-boat Activity, 28th April 1944, AOR RG 38.
[120] Ibid.
[121] F.W. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, vol. III, part 2 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 56.

the English coast. Moreover, other SIGINT decrypted messages revealed that the E-boats created "alarm in the German naval commands by sighting Allied landing craft about 20 miles from Slapton Sands on an easterly course."[122] The Germans, though, "by 0347 on 28 April appreciated that as the landing craft had turned north, and as the E-boats had been in the area west of a line Portland-Casquets since 2300 on 27 April without sighting large Allied formations, no major Allied landing attempt need be assumed."[123] At first the Germans were fearful that Convoy T-4 was part of the actual invasion, but once the convoy changed course back toward the English coast, their fears abated.

The ships that survived the E-boat attack, LST 496, LST 515, LST 511, LST 58, LST 499, and amazingly, LST 289, participated in the Normandy invasion. Two of the ships, LST 496 and LST 499, sank as a result of enemy action (German mines destroyed LST 496 off Omaha Beach, and on 11 June 1944, LST 499 sank as a result of enemy action).[124] Others either saw action after the war or were scrapped and sold for parts.

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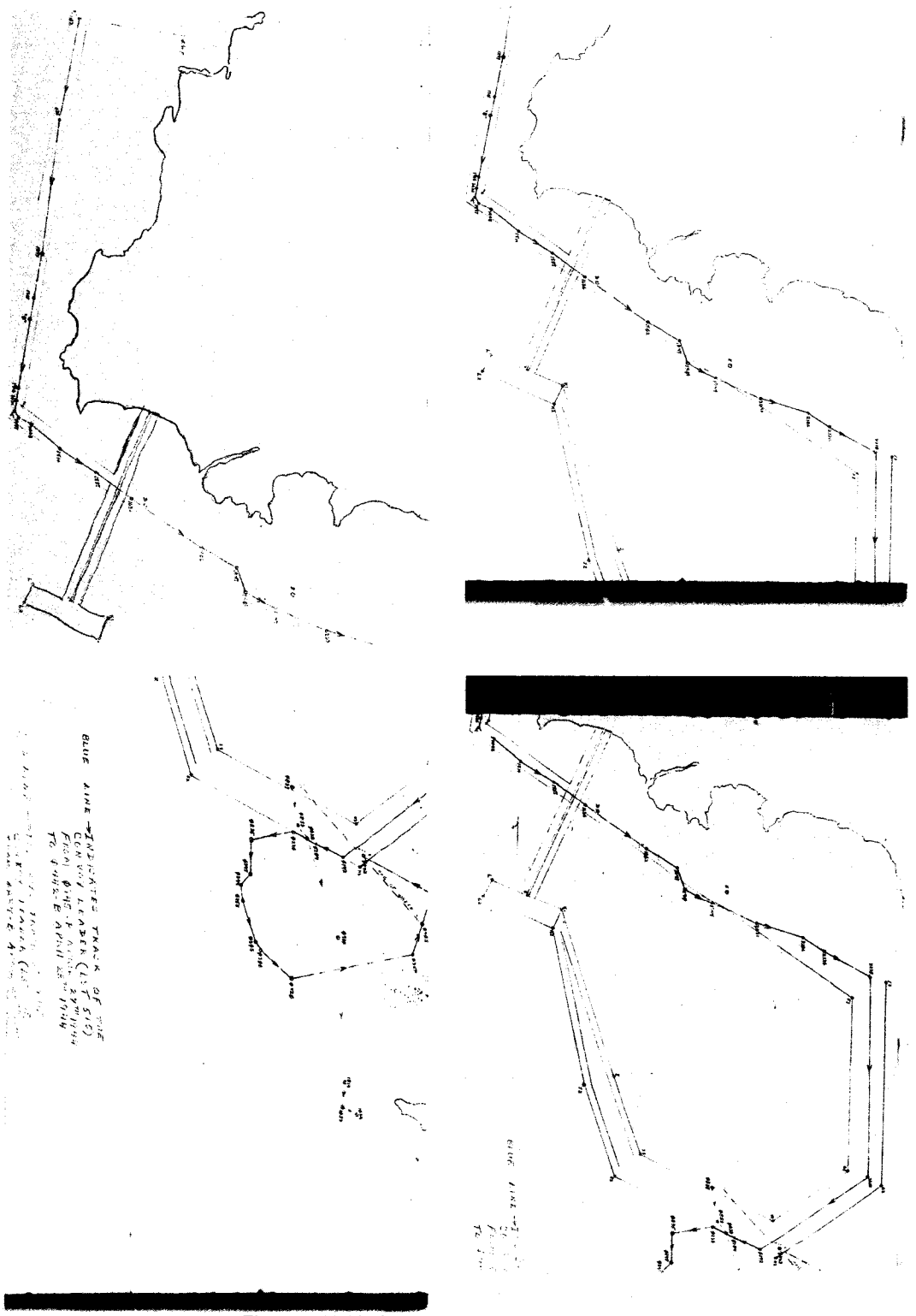
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid., 56-57.
[124] NavSource Online, *Tank Landing Ship (LST) Index*, LST 496 and LST 499, http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/16idx.htm, accessed 14 September 2006.

Order of Action

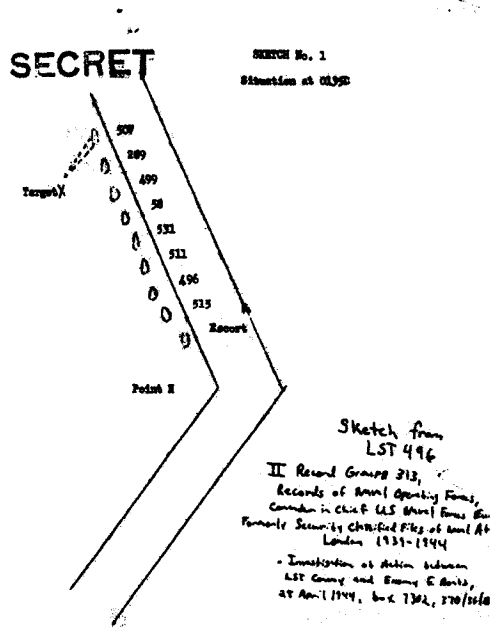
Event	515	496	511	531*	58	499	289	507**
Flares Seen			0114		2352 0020	2340 0020 0114	0020	
Felt Underwater Jar						0120 0123 0128	0104	
Saw gunfire Astern	0135	0135	0135		0133	0138	0130	
Evaded Torpedo						0203	0219	
Observed First Torpedoed and Burning Ship	0204	0215	0205		0202	0203	0203	
Observed 2nd torpedoed and Burning Ship	*** 0208	0221	0221		0217	0220	0219	
LSTs Opened Initial Fire	**** 0220	0221	0222	Fired after 0225 being hit.	0225	Did not fire	0228	Did not fire
Radioed Attack	0232					0225		
Observed 3rd Torpedoed and Burning Ship		0221						
Heard E boats					0217 0224 0302			
Saw E boats		0228			0225 0302			
E boats Crossed Bow	0225		Between 0222 & 0224					
Saw Periscope			0500					

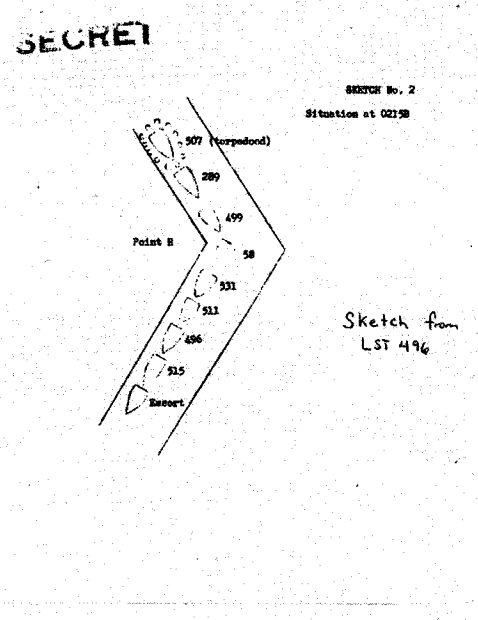
All Times Baker.
* No records available
** No records available
*** This should be 0218
**** This should be 0218

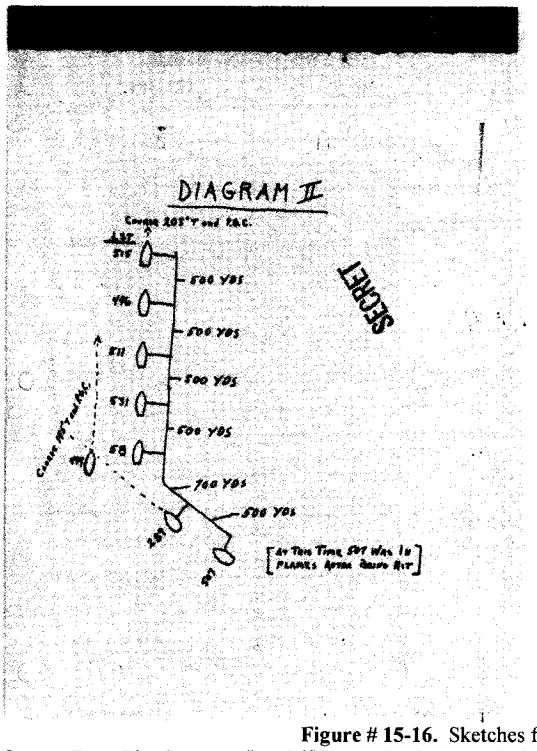
Figure #10. Order of Action
Source: Commander LST Group 32, Commander Task Unit 125.11.4, Action Report, 3 May 1944, AOR RG 38.



Figures # 11-14. Convoy T-4's route (clockwise from left to right)
Source: WW II Action and Operational Reports, Action Report Commander LST Group 32, Commander Task Unit 125.11.4, serial 001, 3 May 1944, Exercise Tiger, box 674, 370/44/32/6, RG 38.







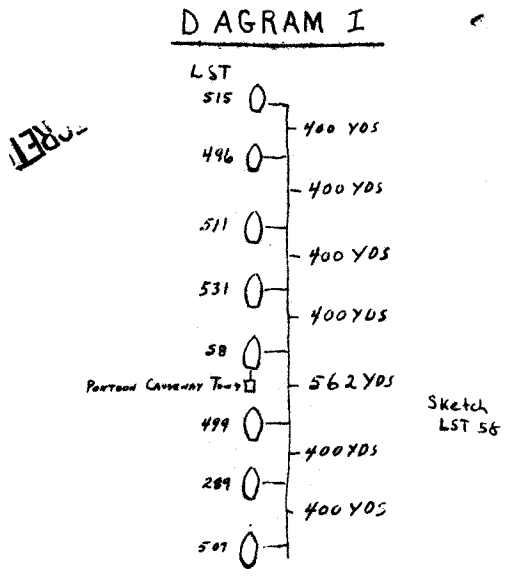
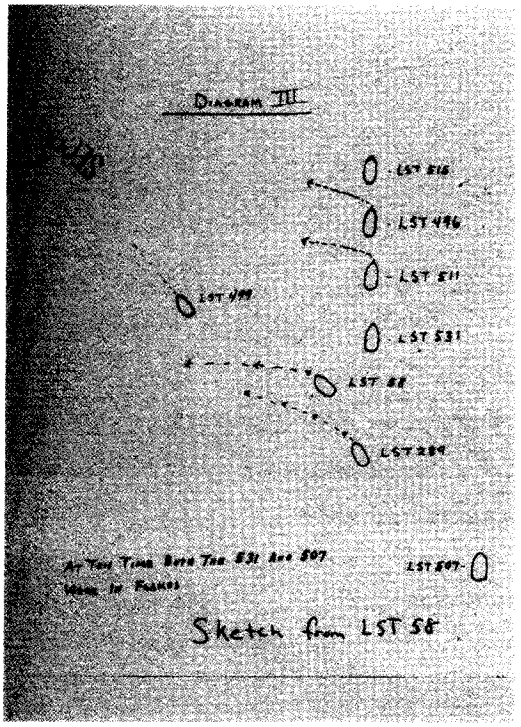
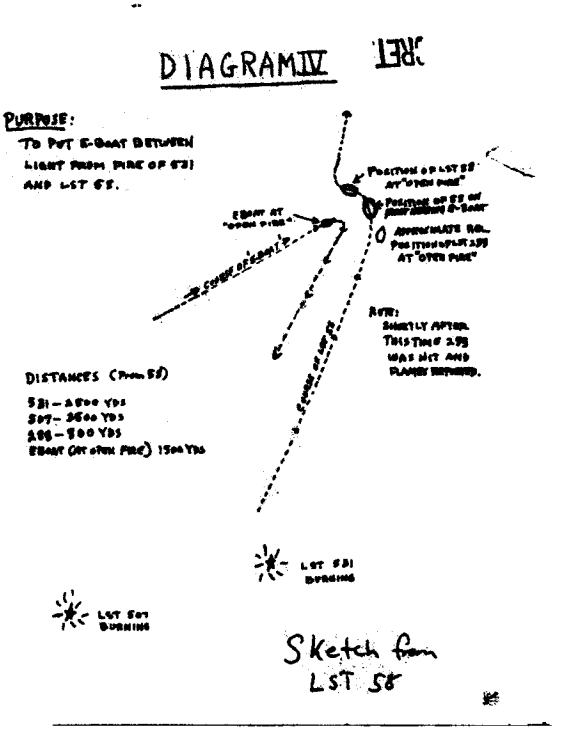
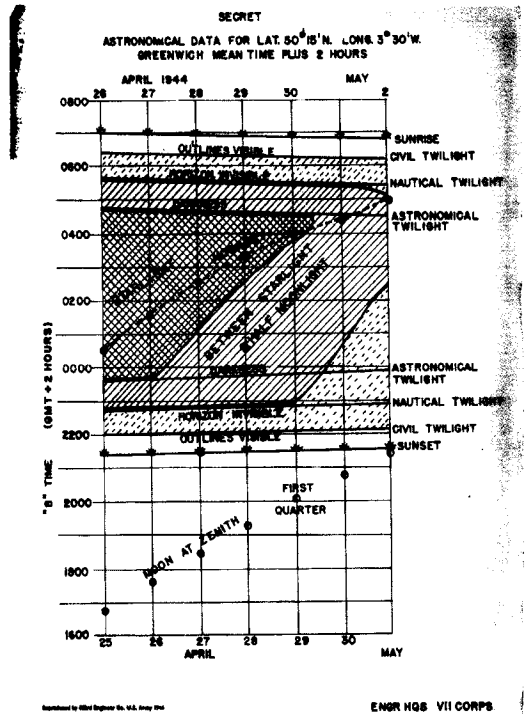


Figure # 15-16. Sketches from LST 496 (top from left to right)
Source: From The Commanding Officer to The Commander in Chief, U.S. Navy, Report of Action Taking Place Morning Of 28 April 1944, 30 April 1944, AOR RG 38.

Figure # 17-18. Sketches from LST 58 (bottom from left to right)
Source: LST 58, The Commanding Officer to The Commanding-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet, 3 May 1944, AOR RG 38.







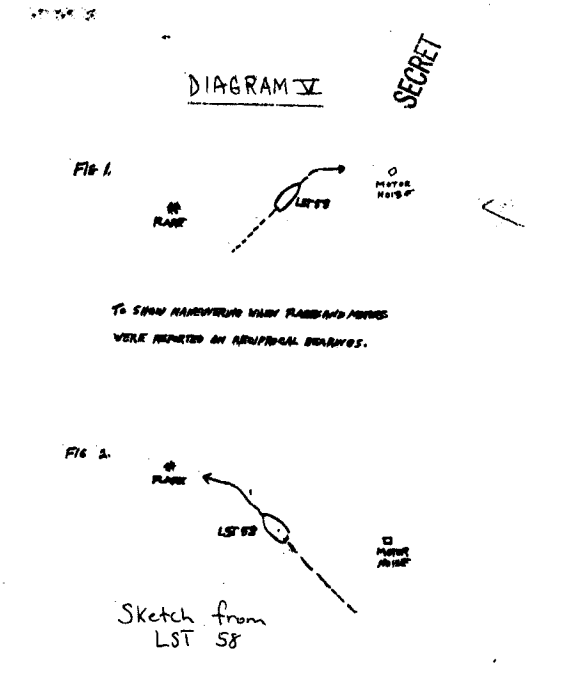


Figure # 19-21 (clockwise from top). Sketches from LST 58
Source: LST 58, The Commanding Officer to The Commanding-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet, 3 May 1944, AOR RG 38.
Figure # 22 (bottom left). Astronomical Chart
Source: Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Entry 427, World War II Operations Reports, RG 407.

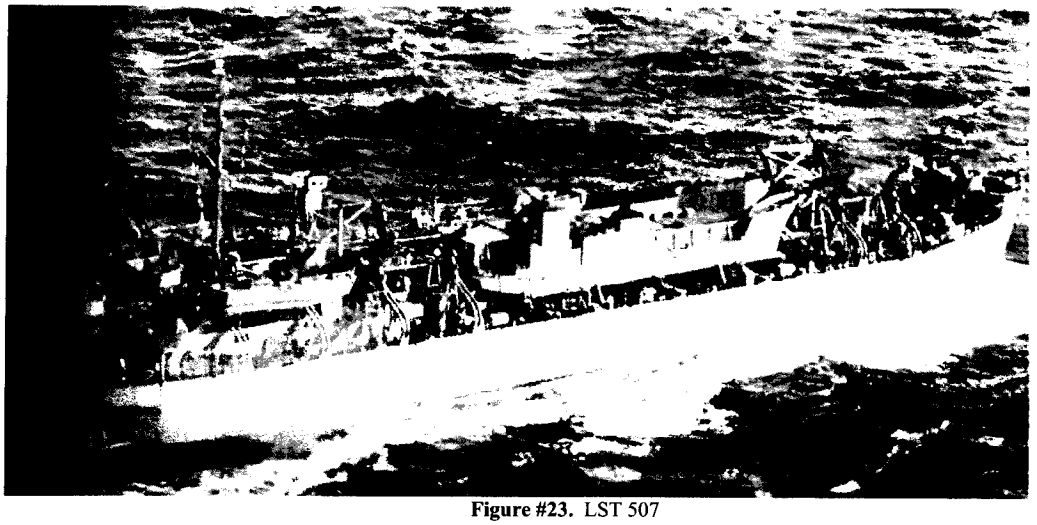


Figure #23. LST 507
Source: http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/16/160507.htm.

Figure #24. LST 289
Source: http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/16/160289.htm.

Figure #25. LST 511
Source: http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/16/160511.htm.

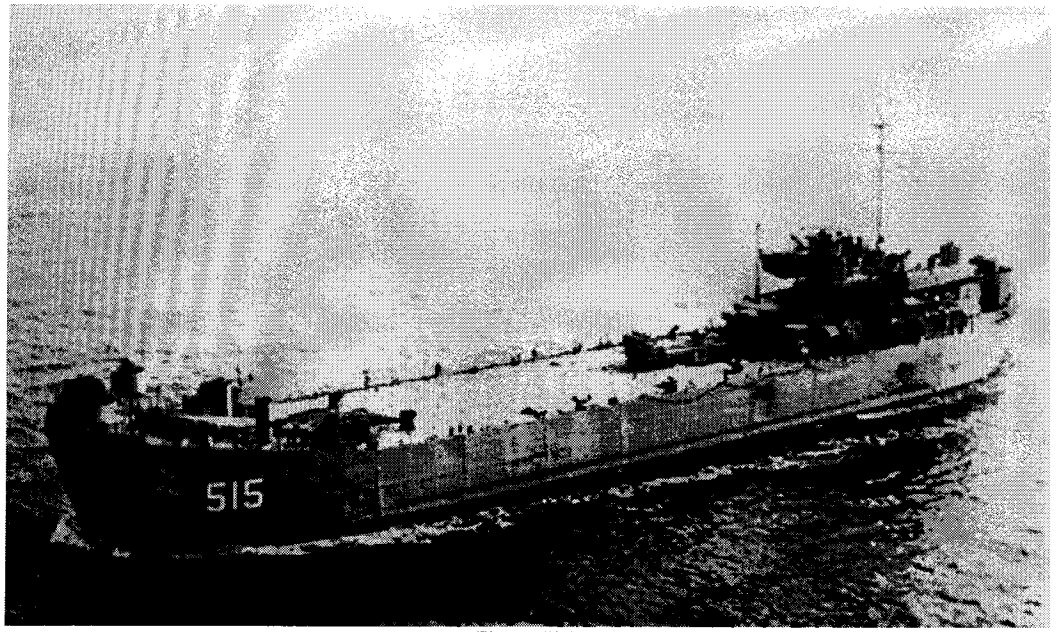


Figure #26. LST 515
Source: http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/16/160515.htm.

Photo # 80-G-231960 USS LST-499 and other landing craft off Utah Beach, 6 June 1944

Figure #27. LST 499
Source: http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/16/160499.htm.

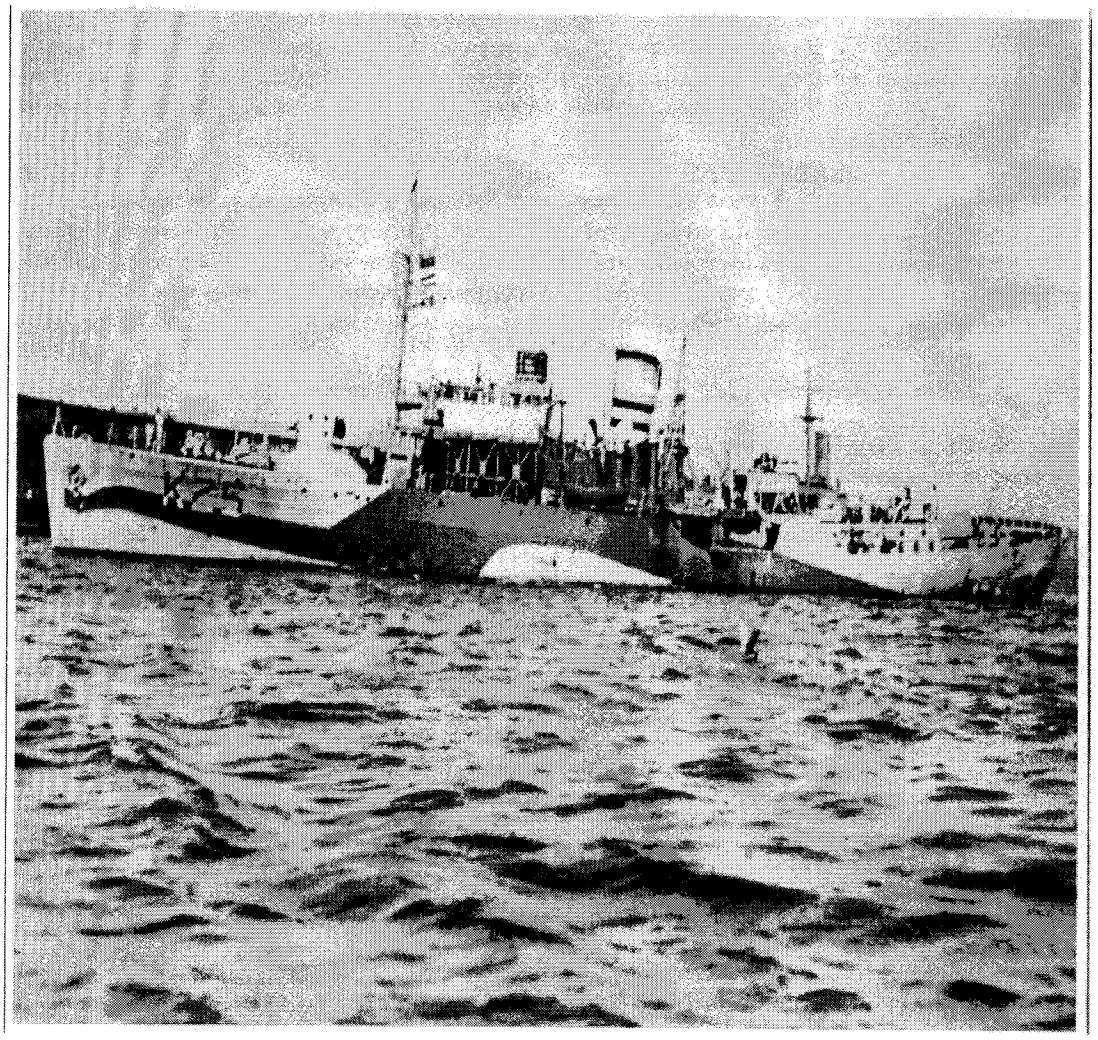


Figure #28. H.M.S. Azalea
Source: http://www.answers.com/topic/list-of-flower-class-corvettes.

Chapter III

The Failure of Command

The man on the spot may have information, not available to the commander, that gives an entirely different picture. The subordinate must be trusted, or if not trusted removed. The commander should furnish the subordinate with all available information, and leave the execution of the mission to the man on the spot. . . . By the same token, the man on the spot must act and act now. . . .[125]

Admiral William F. Halsey

Delegation of command is a necessity, and commanders must, therefore, take every opportunity to training their subordinates in accepting responsibility for departure from, or variation in, the mode of carrying out orders or directions originally given, impressing on them at the same time that such departures or variations must always be justified by the circumstances of the case. It is imperative that all officers should be taught to think, and, subject to general instructions and accepted principles, to act for themselves.[126]

Dudley W. Knox

A subordinate commander may find himself faced with an unexpected situation that has not been foreseen or covered in his orders from higher authority and which necessitates action on his part before he can communicate with his superior and receive instructions . . . Such situations will probably be emergencies. The subordinate must grasp the full importance of the situation and decide whether or not he can carry out the assigned task. If he decides his task can and must be executed, he may have to make a different plan for its accomplishment. If he decides to assume a new task for himself, it is essential that the task selected be one which will further the general plan of his superior.[127]

Chapter 5, Section 5 of the U.S. Navy's 1934 war instructions

The difference between a poor officer and a good one, Burke informed one junior officer, was 'about ten seconds.'[128]

Unarguably, command at sea is the most important component in naval warfare. In World War II, however, commanders afloat faced persistent problems from both below as well as above the sea. The threat of air power and the constant threat of submarine attack, along with changes in technology such as wireless radio and radar, posed new-found problems for commanders afloat. Michael Palmer's *Command at Sea* explained that following World War I:

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[125] Quoted in Michael A. Palmer, *Command at Sea: Naval Command and Control since the Sixteenth Century* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 254.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid., 258.
[128] Ibid., 263.

> Questions about naval command and control remained subject to debate. The war had demonstrated that the fruits of the industrial revolution were at least reshaping what could now properly be termed the "technology" of naval command and control. Wireless telegraphy had played a major role in naval strategy, operations, and at times even tactics. But even as new technologies offered the prospect of better control, concurrent technological advances placed additional strains on commanders in chief.[129]

Palmer further stated that the "pressures of command at sea in the twentieth century were far greater than they had ever been during the age of sail. Fleets moved more quickly, covered more ocean, included a far more complex mix of forces with varying strengths and weaknesses, and could strike at distances unimaginable a century earlier."[130] He also argued that while the "technology of command had advanced, that progress had been more than offset by the narrowing of a commander's decisionmaking window. It remained unknown whether, in the face of these formidable challenges, the technology of command could ultimately provide a solution to the problems of control."[131] Therefore, with new threats and technological innovations now posed to commanders afloat, should command reside more with the senior officer ashore or his subordinates afloat?

Following the conclusion of World War I, a major debate arose in the United States Navy over the question of command. This dispute was between two divergent schools of thought: those who favored a centralized command system, a system where the highest levels of command exercised absolute control over the forces afloat; and those who favored a decentralized system, a structure that allowed subordinates the initiative to act and think for themselves when a problem presented itself.

Undoubtedly, in war, although individuals higher in command may wish to impose their command once action occurs, the subordinates on the scene may see the

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[129] Ibid., 251.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

situation differently and therefore must have authority to act as they interpret the situation. The subordinates must be "well-trained and well-indoctrinated" and must act "upon their own initiative."[132] Thus, a decentralized system, when compared to a centralized system, is better in the respect that the subordinate may see the situation differently from his superior officer, consequently leaving him the ability to execute orders that may save his fleet or destroy the enemy's fleet. But, as with the case concerning Exercise Tiger's naval officers, if the subordinates lack initiative and are incapable of making effective decisions, then disastrous events like the Slapton Sands debacle may follow.

Rear Admiral Don P. Moon, United States Navy, was the leading naval commander for Utah and leader of Exercise Tiger's naval forces. Don Pardee Moon was born in Kokomo, Indiana, on 18 April 1894. Beginning on 3 August 1912, Moon attended the United States Naval Academy. At the Academy, he completed the Naval War College Correspondence course in tactics and strategy, his junior and senior courses, and in 1921-1922, following five years at sea, completed a postgraduate course in Ordnance and Engineering at the Naval Academy. Next, Moon obtained a masters degree at the University of Chicago and achieved the rank of lieutenant. Throughout Moon's schooling, his specialty was in ordnance and gunnery.[133]

After graduating fourth in his class in 1916, Moon served on the U.S.S. *Arizona* as an ensign. Moon created several ship instruments while on board the *Arizona* that

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[132] Ibid., 252.

[133] *Navy Directory: officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, also including officers of the U.S. Naval Reserve Force, Marine Corps Reserve (active), and foreign officers serving with the Navy* (Washington D.C: Bureau of Navigation, Navy Dept., GPO, 1917-1944); Jonathan P. Alter and Daniel Crouch, *My Dear Moon* (Charleston: Book Surge LLC, 2005) Ch. 2, p. 1.

improved the ship's gunnery. From 1923-1926, Moon, by this time a lieutenant, served on the battleships *Colorado* and *Nevada*.[134] At the end of the 1920s, he served at the Bureau of Ordnance and at the Naval Gun Factory in Washington, D.C. Afterwards, from 1929-1932, Moon, now a lieutenant commander, became a destroyer gunnery officer on various destroyer squadrons. From July 1929 to June 1930, he served as squadron gunnery officer on the staff of Commander, Squadron 11, Battle Fleet, followed by duty on the staff of Commander Destroyer Squadron 6, Battle Fleet (title changed on 1 April 1931 to Destroyer Squadron 4, Battle Force, U.S. Fleet).

During his assignment with Destroyer Squadron 6, Moon also had temporary duty as executive officer of the U.S.S. *Preble* in connection with the Battle Force Gunnery School. From June 1932 to May 1934 Moon attended the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, and remained at the college as a member of the staff.[135] In 1934, Moon became commanding officer on the *John D. Ford* of the Asiatic Fleet. Two years after that promotion, he obtained the rank of commander.

Moon, following his promotion, served as a Commander of Destroyer Division 15 before his return to the Naval War College in June 1937 to complete his senior course. He decided to remain at the college for two years as an instructor.[136] In May 1940, Moon went aboard the U.S.S. *Sterett*. This ship, launched 27 October 1938, was part of Destroyer Squadron 15. Moon received command of the Division in June 1940 (at this

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[134] Alter and Crouch, *My Dear Moon*, Ch. 2, p. 1.
[135] Alter and Crouch, *My Dear Moon*, Ch. 2, p. 2.
[136] Ibid., Ch. 2, p.1.

time Moon served on U.S.S. *Lang*).[137] For one month, November 1941, Moon commanded Destroyer Squadron 27 and then received command of Destroyer Squadron 8 in December 1941. For his service with Destroyer Squadron 8, Moon received a letter of commendation, which contained a ribbon from the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet:

> The Commander in Chief noted with much pleasure and gratification the report of your performance of duty as Commander Destroyer Squadron EIGHT during the assault on and occupation of French Morocco from November 8, 1942, to November 11, 1942. During this period you handled your squadron in a cool and effective manner, you provided an excellent anti-submarine screen as well as splendid anti-aircraft protection while under hostile fire. You are commended for the outstanding performance of your squadron, and for your exemplary conduct and leadership under fire of hostile forces during the period described which are keeping with the highest tradition of the Naval Service.[138]

By 1 July 1941, Moon had served in the navy for fourteen years and eight months and held his previous position for two years and four months. He was on the promotion list to become captain and ranked thirty-fourth in pay grade.[139] He finally received promotion to captain on 1 September 1941.[140] After achieving the rank of captain, Moon received command of an Atlantic Fleet Squadron; his squadrons served as protectors for convoys in the campaigns of North Africa and northern Russia.[141] During his convoy duties to Russia, Moon witnessed the most costly convoy loss of the war—the devastation of Convoy PQ 17—where he served as a Senior Officer, Destroyers, of the

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[137] *Navy Directory: officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, also including officers of the U.S. Naval Reserve Force, Marine Corps Reserve (active), and foreign officers serving with the Navy* (Washington D.C: Bureau of Navigation, Navy Dept., GPO, 1940).
[138] Alter and Crouch, *My Dear Moon*, Ch. 2, p. 2.
[139] *Navy Directory: officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, also including officers of the U.S. Naval Reserve Force, Marine Corps Reserve (active), and foreign officers serving with the Navy* (Washington D.C: Bureau of Navigation, Navy Dept., GPO, 1941).
[140] Ibid.
[141] Naval Historical Center, Rear Admiral Don P. Moon, http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/pers-us/uspers-m/dp-moon.htm, accessed 8 January 2006.

covering forces.[142] Moon's next assignment was on the War Plans Division staff of the Chief of Naval Operations under Admiral Ernest King from November of 1942 through January 1944.

Following his two year stint under King, Moon transferred to the Mediterranean where he reached the rank of rear admiral.[143] This opportunity presented itself after Rear Admiral John Hall left for England to prepare for Normandy. The Allies needed another Force Commander in the Mediterranean to replace Hall and to continue planning for Operation Anvil, the invasion of southern France. They chose Moon for the job and he reported to the Mediterranean theatre in January 1944 to begin planning for the operation.

In the spring of 1944, the Allies expanded the Normandy assault area from three to five beaches, and the United States needed a new naval commander for the newly conceived Utah beach. Once again the Allies promoted Moon to the new command. On 4 March 1944, he reported to COM 12th Fleet (Admiral Harold R. Stark), which then assigned him to Admiral Kirk and CTF 122. Kirk then assigned Moon to Rear Admiral Hall (Commander 11th Amphibious Force, Force O) and Hall made him Commander Group II, 11th PHIB, and second in command.[144]

Moon arrived in England at a hectic time. He had two months "to bring his force into being, to organize it, and to train it with the associated Army formations. The large program of successive exercises to be arranged with concurrent planning of Operation

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[142] Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 45-46.
[143] Alter and Crouch, *My Dear Moon*, Ch. 2, p. 3.
[144] United States Naval Administration in World War II: Operation Neptune, vol. 5, *The Invasion of Normandy*, (unpublished, 1948), 363.

NEPTUNE, this force, working against time, had a formidable task to accomplish."[145] Moon's operation orders "were often finished just prior to the sailing of the participating forces. The next exercise had to be planned before the previous one had even commenced."[146] Moon's forces trained in exercises Muskrat (24-27 March), Beaver (29-31 March), and Tiger (22-30 April).[147]

Christopher Yung, in his *Gators of Neptune*, argued that despite Moon's accolades and decorations, his appointment as naval Commander of Force Utah (Force U) was "somewhat surprising."[148] As Yung noted: "Prior to this appointment, he had had no experience in the planning or execution of amphibious operations. His only link to amphibious warfare was his command of a destroyer squadron during Operation Torch."[149] Yung argued that Moon "was the least qualified participant in amphibious warfare and had the least amount of time to train and prepare his amphibious Assault Force."[150]

General "Lightning" Joe Collins was the leader of the VII Corps and worked with Moon on the plans for Exercise Tiger and plans for the Utah Beach landings. Moon and Collins worked closely together for several months prior to Normandy in order to perfect, as best they could, the practice landings at Slapton Sands. In Collins' memoir, *Lightning Joe,* the general noted certain incidents that revealed several of Moon's personality traits. For example, Collins' first impressions of Moon were that he

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[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid., 364.
[148] Yung, *Gators*, 18.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.

> was an attractive, friendly man and I liked him right off. Our paths had never crossed before but we had several mutual friends in the Navy, and he knew of my service in the Pacific . . . . After a drive around the city, which as a major port had been severely damaged by German bombardment early in the war, I left Plymouth assured that we had made a good start toward sound and friendly relation with our Navy counterparts.[151]

Collins further explained that his relations with Moon were good, but he worried about Moon's heightened stress and his ability to overwork himself. Moon's staff noted that he tended to work extremely long hours every day with very little sleep.[152]

As they worked closer together on the final details regarding the multiple joint arrangements involved in the amphibious operation, Collins believed that he and Moon had grown closer together as a working staff.[153] Collins, though, "became a bit concerned about Don Moon's working overtime and his tendency to do too much himself instead of giving some of his responsibilities to his staff. Occasionally I tried to get him to leave his office early and join me in a walk or a game of tennis, but was never able to do so."[154] Collins also thought that he "detected a certain lack of firmness and a tendency to be overly cautious, which worried me."[155] Collins wrote to his wife that Moon "is the first Admiral I've ever met who wears rubbers on a mere rainy day."[156]

Rear Admiral John L. Hall, Jr., reiterated Collins' observations of Admiral Moon. Hall thought that once Moon took command of Force U he was "in over his head in taking on an assault force."[157] Moon's only amphibious experience prior to receiving

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[151] James L. Collins, *Lightning Joe, An Autobiography* (New Orleans: Louisiana State university Press, 1979), 186.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid., 192.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Susan Godson, *Viking of Assault: Admiral John Lesslie Hall, Jr., and amphibious warfare* (Lanham: University of America, 1982), 121.

command of Force U was commanding a destroyer squadron in Operation Torch. Furthermore, Hall believed that Moon worked too hard and "never learned to let others handle less important duties. He fretted about his force, his landing exercise and the upcoming assault. Unsure of himself he constantly consulted Hall."[158]

The United States navy probably made a wrong choice when it selected Moon to plan and command Utah. According to Moon's counterparts, Collins and Hall, and his own staff, it is apparent that Moon, although well liked and respected, appeared to be overwhelmed by his new assignment. He had arrived in England in March, just a few months before the biggest amphibious invasion in human history, and it was his job, although relatively new to amphibious operations, to plan for not only the last practice exercises before Normandy, but also for the landings at Utah beach. Moon was under extreme pressure at a pivotal time in World War II.

British Admiral Ralph Leatham was the commander-in-chief at Plymouth, England, during Exercise Tiger. Born in Wakefield, Yorkshire on 3 March 1886, Leatham received his education on board the cadet training ship H.M.S. *Britannia* (1900) and at the Imperial Defense College. From June 1923 to January 1925, Leatham served as Commander (Executive Officer) on board the H.M.S. *Curacoa*, a cruiser in the Atlantic Fleet, and as the commanding officer on the cruiser H.M.S. *Yarmouth*. Following his two years as commanding officer of the two cruisers, Leatham returned to the Imperial Defense College, taught the Imperial Defense Course, and served as President of the college from January 1927 through July 1927. After his brief time at the

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[158] Ibid.

college, from November 1928 to April 1930, he took the position as Commanding Officer aboard the cruiser H.M.S. *Durban*, which was stationed in the West Indies and the United States. He then returned to teaching in April 1931, at the Royal Naval College in Greenwich, England. After leaving the Royal Naval College in September 1932, Leatham transferred to the Mediterranean as the commanding officer of the battleships H.M.S. *Ramillies* and H.M.S. *Valiant*; he commanded the *Valiant* from May 1934 until July 1935. Afterward, he served as Commanding Officer, HMS *President IV* (Base Defenses, Mediterranean).

From September 1937 through February 1938, he served as Chief of Staff and maintenance captain on board H.M.S. *Victory* at the Royal Naval base in Portsmouth. While there, Leatham took a tactical course on the *Victory*, which lasted for one month (from May-June 1938). Once he finished his tactical course in Portsmouth, he became rear-admiral of the 1st Battle Squadron on the battleship H.M.S. *Barham* (June 1938 through 1939), which was part of the Royal Navy's home fleet. His resumé also included Commander-in-Chief of the East Indies from April 1939 to April 1941. He received the Plymouth command on 24 August 1943 and served in the post until July 1945.[159]

Bernard J. Skahill, USN, was the commander of Convoy T-4. Less than four years Moon's junior, Skahill, a New York native, entered the United States Naval

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[159] Hans Houterman and Jeroen Koppes, "Royal Navy Officers," http://www.unithistories.com/units_index/default.asp?file=../officers/personsx.html, Accessed 13 September 2006.

Academy on 20 July 1917 and received his commission on 3 June 1921.[160] While at the Naval Academy, Skahill took courses in strategy and tactics as well as international law.[161] In 1922, following his graduation from the Academy, Skahill's first assignment was on the U.S.S. *North Dakota*, where he served on the ship as an ensign.[162] Skahill transferred to the U.S.S. *Pillsbury* shortly thereafter, in May of 1922, where he served on the ship less than a year.[163]

Following his service on board the *Pillsbury*, Skahill started two years of service in the submarines U.S.S. *S-6* (January 1923–August 1924) and U.S.S. *S-15* (September 1924–February 1925); by the time he served on U.S.S. *S-15*, he had achieved the rank of Lieutenant (jg.).[164] In March 1925, Skahill transferred to the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida. His service in Pensacola did not last long, though, because in May of the same year he transferred to the U.S.S. *Mississippi*.[165] In 1928, after three years on

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[160] *Navy Directory: officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, also including officers of the U.S. Naval Reserve Force, Marine Corps Reserve (active), and foreign officers serving with the Navy* (Washington D.C: Bureau of Navigation, Navy Dept., GPO, 1921).
[161] *Navy Directory: officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, also including officers of the U.S. Naval Reserve Force, Marine Corps Reserve (active), and foreign officers serving with the Navy* (Washington D.C: Bureau of Navigation, Navy Dept., GPO, 1941).
[162] *Navy Directory: officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, also including officers of the U.S. Naval Reserve Force, Marine Corps Reserve (active), and foreign officers serving with the Navy* (Washington D.C: Bureau of Navigation, Navy Dept., GPO, 1921).
[163] *Navy Directory: officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, also including officers of the U.S. Naval Reserve Force, Marine Corps Reserve (active), and foreign officers serving with the Navy* (Washington D.C: Bureau of Navigation, Navy Dept., GPO, 1922).
[164] *Navy Directory: officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, also including officers of the U.S. Naval Reserve Force, Marine Corps Reserve (active), and foreign officers serving with the Navy* (Washington D.C: Bureau of Navigation, Navy Dept., GPO, 1923-1925).
[165] *Navy Directory: officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, also including officers of the U.S. Naval Reserve Force, Marine Corps Reserve (active), and foreign officers serving with the Navy* (Washington D.C: Bureau of Navigation, Navy Dept., GPO, 1925).

board the *Mississippi* and seven years of service, Skahill reached the rank of lieutenant.[166] He served on the *Mississippi* until July 1928 before being reassigned to the Puget Sound Navy Yard, Washington, where he worked for the Naval Ammunition Depot.[167] Following his two year stint in Washington, Skahill served on U.S.S. *Badger* from July 1930 until spring 1933.[168] On 30 June 1933, he transferred to the University of Washington in Seattle, and participated in the R.O.T.C.U. until the spring of 1935. Skahill's next assignment was the Arctic; he served there from 6 June 1935 until he transferred on 30 June 1938 to his new assignment at the Naval Air Station in Norfolk, Virginia. While at the Naval Air Station, Skahill completed two Naval War College courses: Correspondence Courses in Strategy and Tactics and International Law. The Navy, by 1 July 1939, also promoted Skahill to the rank of lieutenant commander during his duty in Norfolk.[169]

By 22 January 1940, the navy promoted Skahill to the rank of lieutenant commander (exec) while serving on the U.S.S. *Rapidan*; before his time on the *Rapidan*, Skahill's last duty at sea was his Artic duty, which ended in June 1938.[170] A year later, in

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[166] *Navy Directory: officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, also including officers of the U.S. Naval Reserve Force, Marine Corps Reserve (active), and foreign officers serving with the Navy* (Washington D.C: Bureau of Navigation, Navy Dept., GPO, 1928).
[167] Ibid.
[168] United States Navy, *Register of commissioned and warrant officers of the United States Naval Reserve* (Washington D.C: For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1930-1933).
[169] United States Navy, *Register of Commissioned and Warrant Officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps* (Washington D.C: For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1934-1939).
[170] *Navy Directory: officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, also including officers of the U.S. Naval Reserve Force, Marine Corps Reserve (active), and foreign officers serving with the Navy* (Washington D.C: Bureau of Navigation, Navy Dept., GPO, 1940).

April 1941, he served on the *Rapidan* as the lieutenant commander gunnery (exec).[171] In 1941, after serving in the navy for over fifteen years, Skahill ranked 793 out of 1586 American lieutenant commanders.[172] After the outbreak of war, Skahill's naval records are unclear. What is known is that, by 1944, Skahill had been promoted to the rank of commander, which led him to Exercise Tiger and Convoy T-4.[173]

From the time Skahill received his commission until Exercise Tiger, he was never in the upper echelon of his officer class; he always ranked around the middle or toward the bottom. Skahill's decision-making during the E-boat attack suggests that there were reasons he never ranked at the top of his officer class.

Lieutenant Commander George C. Giddes, RNR, was the senior escort commander for the American convoy. Giddes participated in convoy missions to the South Atlantic prior to his coastal escort duty along the English coast. In his interview with Moon following the attack, Giddes stated that, until seven or eight weeks before the E-boat attack, he had served on ocean escorts to places such as Capetown and Algiers.[174] James Tent's *E-boat Alert* argued that while Giddes and his crew "had gained much experience in protecting convoys from U-boat attacks on the Atlantic reaches," they "were relative newcomers to Britain's coastal waters."[175]

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[171] *Navy Directory: officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps, also including officers of the U.S. Naval Reserve Force, Marine Corps Reserve (active), and foreign officers serving with the Navy* (Washington D.C: Bureau of Navigation, Navy Dept., GPO, 1941).
[172] Ibid.
[173] United States Navy, *Register of Commissioned and Warrant Officers of the United States Navy and Marine Corps* (Washington D.C: For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O., 1944).
[174] Transcript of Interview Between CTF 125 and Commanding Officer HMS Azalea, 29 April 1944, AOR RG 38.
[175] Tent, *E-boat Alert*, 12.

Moon, Skahill, and Giddes, to varying degrees, were out of their element when they participated in Exercise Tiger. Skahill and Giddes lacked the vital experience needed to fend off an E-boat attack.

The Allies suffered a command failure when Convoy T-4 started toward Slapton Sands. Multiple mistakes, from both the Americans and British, led the American convoy astray, resulting in the loss of valuable LSTs and several hundred American lives. Doubtless, war is war, and it is always an unpredictable phenomenon that can rear its head in the most ferocious manner, but if the right leadership is in place—which was not the case in Exercise Tiger—disastrous events are avoidable. A majority of blunders in war occur from a lack of leadership and a failure of command at the lower levels.

Errors resulting in substandard escort protection and flawed communication problems were without question two of the leading factors that led Convoy T-4 to its ultimate destruction. If the Allies had corrected these two blunders before the attack, then Exercise Tiger would serve only as a footnote in World War II scholarship, only recognized for its importance as one of several practice operations for the Normandy invasion. Instead, the Tiger disaster remained one of the worst naval blunders in World War II. Poor escort protection and lack of communication between the Americans and British, though, were not the sole causes of the Exercise Tiger failure.

One difference between the Americans and the British was their command structures; the Americans favored a unified command structure whereas the British

preferred a cooperative one.[176] In 1927, the United States army and navy agreed to a unified command system based on joint action. Eight years later, the United States altered the system so that the two armed services "engaged in single operations would be formed into Task Forces each under the command of the Senior Officer of whichever service was pre-eminently concerned."[177] The task force leader exercised operational control.

On the other hand, the British favored coordination between the army, navy, and air. The British created a system that established "an authority called the Combined Commanders, composed of CinC Land forces, a CinC Naval Forces, a CinC Air Forces, and the Chief of Combined Operations."[178] These leaders commanded jointly during combined operations and each commander-in-chief served under his own service ministry.

British Admiral Bertram Ramsay became Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief on 25 October 1943. After his appointment, Ramsay modified Neptune's chain of command structure so he could have "'over-all control whilst ensuring that full value was made of the existing organizations.'"[179] For his structure to work, Ramsay created a division of responsibilities between the individuals involved in Neptune's operation. Thus, Ramsey created a command system based more on the British model (cooperation and coordination) than the United States model (unified command). With the approval of the

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[176] Adrian R. Lewis, *Omaha Beach: A Flawed Victory* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 294.
[177] US Navy, *Invasion of Normandy*, 172.
[178] Ibid.,173.
[179] Ibid., 211.

British Admiralty and Admiral Harold R. Stark (COMTWELTHFLT), Ramsay suggested the following responsibilities between the major authorities concerned:

a. During the period of formation and operational training of the assault forces, ANCXF would issue general directions concerning the coordination of planning, and of the training of naval forces. In the case of British forces these were to be issued via the normal chain of command (viz. via the C's-in-C Home Commands). In the case of U.S. forces, they were to be issued via CTF 122 (Rear Admiral Alan Kirk)

b. Administrative instructions were to be issued to the British and U.S. Forces separately by the Allied Naval Commander-In-Chief and by Commander Task Force 122.

c. For day-to-day administrations and operation purposes, the British Assault and Follow-up Force Commanders were responsible to the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Command, within which they were based. For the same purposes the U.S. Assault and Follow-up Force Commanders were required to conform to the local regulation of the Home Command within which they were based, but were responsible to normal U.S. Naval authorities, or as laid down by Commander Task Force 122.

d. In addition to his executive function, in command of the Allied Naval Forces allotted to the operation, ANCXF was the naval advisor and the naval planning authority of the Supreme Commander.

e. ANCXF was to issue the naval outline plan, and at a later date, his operation orders in sufficient time to enable Commander Western Task Force (CTF 122), Naval Commander Eastern Task Force and the Naval Assault and Follow-up Force Commanders, to make their detailed plans in collaboration with the appropriate authorities in the other services.

f. ANCXF was to make such adjustments, as might be required, between the strengths of the various naval assault forces and follow-up forces, to give effect to the NEPTUNE plan.

g. The Naval Task Force Commander were to be responsible, for the coordination of the training and organization of their forces and for assuring that they were prepared to execute the naval plan.

h. The Naval Assault and Follow-up Commanders were responsible for the detailed training and organization of their forces.[180]

Admiral Leatham's letter to Rear Admiral John Hall and Plymouth War Order 138, two important documents for understanding Exercise Tiger's chain of command, also need analysis. On 1 Jan 1944, Leatham (Plymouth Command) wrote to Hall (Force O) regarding his position on the upcoming amphibious practice invasions. A major focal point in Leatham's letter concerned the issue of overlapping command. From his letter,

[180] Ibid., 213-214.

Leatham demonstrated his willingness to let his British ships (escorts) operate under the American command. He assured the Americans that they maintained tactical control regarding the practice operations, including the British escorts. Besides providing Royal Navy ships as escorts, it was also Leatham's responsibility to provide the Americans with information about potential attacks from German E-boats, submarines, or the Luftwaffe.[181] Therefore, the letter suggested that the Americans maintain tactical control over the operation while operational command resided with Leatham and the British.

Furthermore, Leatham considered that the Americans retained the choice to modify or cancel the operation as they saw fit, though Leatham believed he retained "full control of the covering forces throughout the operation unless or until otherwise ordered. You [the Americans] will of course be kept informed."[182] Likewise, Leatham explained that he also retained "an overriding control, should there arise circumstances which render it strategically necessary for me to cancel or curtail the exercise."[183] It is clear from Leatham's letter to Hall that he did not want to override the Americans while they were out at sea, but he also wanted the Americans to keep him informed during the exercise.

Additionally, two extracts from Plymouth War Order 138, dated 28 February 1944, explained the command structure and escorting duties for covering the American Task Forces during the amphibious exercises.

> Information of enemy activity of any nature in the vicinity of ships at sea is passed by CinC, Plymouth [Leatham], or NOIC, Dartmouth, as soon as known. In the case of task forces, the address of the signal will include the commanding officer of the task group

[181] Admiral Ralph Leatham to John L. Hall, Jr., 1 January 1944, AOR RG 38.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Ibid.

> and senior officer of the close escort [Giddes]. The control of the task force and close escort will be carried out by the senior officer present, whether British or American. Assuming that the senior officer, task force, is the senior officer, the close escort remains under his orders unless or until released by him. When the task force is on passage, the senior officer, task force, is responsible for ordering the movements of the task force and the close escort as may be necessary.[184]

Furthermore, the order stated that the "responsibility for the safety of both the convoy and the escort rests with the Senior Officer of the escort… Escorts should do everything in their power to assist the Commodore in handling the convoy, in rounding up stragglers, and in helping at the junction of the several parts of the convoy."[185] Therefore, it was Giddes' responsibility, at all cost, to protect the convoy from enemy danger.

And what of Commander Skahill's role? According to Plymouth War Order 138, Skahill was the Senior Officer Present Afloat (SOPA), which meant that once the convoy departed from port he was in command. According to the Plymouth War Order, Skahill was responsible for ordering the movements of the task force *and* the close escort. If the convoy came under attack, Skahill was also responsible for ordering and taking the convoy close inshore as quickly as possible. Therefore, the convoy was his responsibility.

Now that Tiger's command structure and chain of command is clearer, responsibility for the tragic disaster must be apportioned among the British and American commanders. The British made many costly mistakes before the attack. For example, with a threat known to be as problematic as the E-boats, the British had the opportunity to attack the E-boat bases at Cherbourg and LeHarve before the practice exercises

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[184] Plymouth War Order 138, 28 February 1944, AOR RG 38.
[185] Ibid.

commenced. Such was standard to naval theory. Sir Julian Corbett, writing prior to the world wars, argued that the "primary object of the fleet is to secure communications, and if the enemy's fleet is in a position to render them unsafe it must be put out of action."[186]

Christopher Yung's *Gators of Neptune*, though, argued that the Allies did not attack the E-boat sites before or after the attack because concentrated attacks on Cherbourg and LeHarve could indicate to the Germans the location of the impending invasion.[187] Others suggested that the Allies did not attack the Cherbourg harbor because of the importance the harbor possessed for the Normandy invasion plans, which made its capture a primary task.

True, if the Allies bombed the E-boat nerve centers before the invasion, then there would have existed an increased probability that the Germans may have realized the location of the impending invasion. But as unrelenting as the E-boats were prior to the attack on the LSTs, plus the effect that the German raiders posed on the most important invasion in human history, it remained a mystery why the Allies did not attack the two E-boat sites. The British underestimated the E-boats' potential.

More British command failures transpired before Convoy T-4 departed from the English harbors. There were two entwined problems that should never have occurred with Normandy following so closely behind: the failure of communication and lack of British escort protection for the American convoy. It is not clear from the sources why, but the Americans could communicate with neither the Plymouth command nor their

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[186] Julian S. Corbet, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988), 323.
[187] Yung, *Gators*, 231.

British escort. The convoy remained unaware of the events taking place in Cherbourg; namely that the E-boats had penetrated the Cherbourg patrol screen and were headed directly toward Lyme Bay, precisely the same area that the American convoy steamed toward.

The Commander-in-Chief at Plymouth, Admiral Leatham, gave explanations for these two mishaps. First, Leatham believed that one problem that arguably led to the several mix-ups between command (American and British) lay at the feet of Admiral *Moon. Leatham* argued that Exercise Tiger's orders were incomplete and distributed far too late in the exercise for him or other officers involved to study and comprehend them.[188] Justifiably, because Moon was the senior officer and Exercise Tiger's leader, the blame rested with him. He was the leader of the overall exercise and it was Moon as well as his subordinates who formulated the plans for the navy's part in the exercise. But Moon must be excused. He arrived on the scene very late and was almost constantly preparing and working toward the next day. He was under immense pressure during the last months before Normandy.

For several reasons, Leatham shared some of the blame, too. First, Leatham and Plymouth headquarters gave little attention to the later stages of the exercise. While helping to execute Exercise Tiger's final orders, Leatham's attention turned to preparing for the upcoming and final practice operation, Exercise Fabius, the last and most elaborate of the exercises.[189] Furthermore, Leatham explained that at the same time the

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[188] The C-in-C Plymouth to Naval Commander Western Task Force, Exercise Tiger, 5 May 1944, AOR RG 38.
[189] Ibid.

American convoy departed for the exercise, Allied ships prepared for a confrontation with the German navy; three days prior to the disaster, 25/26 April 1944, the Allies and German destroyers squared off in a naval skirmish.[190] Thus, Leatham argued that he had no more ships at his disposal; the *Azalea* and the *Scimitar* were all that he had to offer.[191] Edwin P. Hoyt's *Invasion Before Normandy* explained that two escorts were "not a large escort, but the British had been at this game for a long time, and with one destroyer leading, and a corvette to chase off attackers, the protection had proved adequate in the past."[192]

Leatham and his Plymouth command made one more crucial mistake—and it was a costly one. On 26/27 April 1944, before the H.M.S. *Scimitar* left to rendezvous with the convoy, American LCI 324 rammed the ship, causing damage on the port side of the forecastle but well above the waterline. After arriving in Plymouth, the ship was brought in for refueling, examined for its damage, and prepared to receive temporary repairs. Alas, the dockyard was unable to repair the ship in time for its scheduled departure. Although the ship was deemed seaworthy without repairs, and, though weather conditions were favorable for its scheduled rendezvous with the convoy, Plymouth decided to keep the ship in harbor. The decision was made without notifying the staff officer "principally concerned," who was under the impression that someone informed Moon and Giddes of the situation.[193] The message never got to Moon.

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[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Hoyt, *Invasion*, 100.
[193] The C-in-C Plymouth to Naval Commander Western Task Force, Exercise Tiger, 5 May 1944, AOR RG 38.

Two additional mistakes followed. First, Giddes and H.M.S *Azalea* watched while *Scimitar* headed back to port to assess its damage, but Giddes never reported this to Skahill or to the Plymouth command. Giddes thought that someone in command ordered *Scimitar* back to port and, therefore, believing that it was not his job to do so, did not inform the convoy.[194] Moon and Giddes talked afterward about the lack of escort protection.

> RAdm.. Moon: Q. Did you think it was a little strange that you escorted that convoy with only one ship?
>
> Lt. Cdr. Giddes: A. I did, sir.
>
> RAdm. Moon Q. Did you make any protest against proceeding?
>
> Lt. Cdr. Giddes: A. No, sir.
>
> RAdm. Moon: Q. What is the usual escort for a convoy of this size?
>
> Lt. Cdr. Giddes: A. It varies a lot, sir. Up until 7 or 8 weeks ago, I have been entirely an ocean escort, that is, running down to Capetown, Algiers, etc. from Londonderry and since coming down here, I have been in charge of coastal convoys.
>
> RAdm. Moon: Q. Did you make any protest on taking this convoy with only one escort?
> Lt. Cdr. Giddes: A. No, sir.[195]

Secondly, Leatham and Plymouth Command failed to supply the Americans with another escort until it was too late. The staff officer at Plymouth realized late in the night that something was amiss. The American convoy contained only one escort for protection. As the convoy headed for disaster, the staff officer dispatched a message to H.M.S. *Tanatside* at 12:45 a.m.

After receiving the message, *Tanatside*, now senior escort of the patrols, dispatched H.M.S. *Saladin* at 1:37 a.m., in an attempt to rendezvous with the convoy

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[194] Transcript of Interview Between CTF 125 and Commanding Officer HMS Azalea, 29 April 1944, AOR RG 38.
[195] Ibid.

before the E-boats located it; by this time, Plymouth, from radar contacts and reconnaissance, knew that E-boats had escaped from Cherbourg and were headed toward Lyme Bay, the same direction as the LSTs.[196] *Saladin* headed for the convoy at a speed of twenty-three knots; speed was limited, however, because of the unreliable no. 1 boiler, which was reserved in case the ship encountered E-boats. *Saladin* hoped to locate the convoy by 2:45 a.m.[197] Regardless of *Saladin*'s intentions, the ship was thirty miles from the convoy, and had forty minutes to reach the "sitting ducks" before the E-boats unleashed their wrath. Thus, the ship was only a distant witness. *Saladin* observed the various bursts of tracer and starshell while racing toward the Americans. The ship arrived on the scene at 3:15 a.m., too late to defend the convoy.[198]

Two unknowns arise. One, would the convoy have been safer had the American LCI not rammed the *Scimitar*? And, two, could more escort protection have prevented the disaster? The answer—probably—but these were not the events that ultimately led to the tragedy.

At this point there are several command failures that created a snowballing effect. First, Leatham and his Plymouth command made various mistakes: they gave little attention to the latter stages of Exercise Tiger, they failed to inform Moon of *Scimitar*'s situation, and they realized late in the night the convoy's true escort situation. Leatham's concern centered upon Fabius, which was only days away. Perhaps he suspected that two

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[196] The C-in-C Plymouth to Naval Commander Western Task Force, Exercise Tiger, 5 May 1944, AOR RG 38.
[197] H.M.S. Saladin, Report of Proceedings, E-Boat Attack on Convoy T-4- Exercise Tiger, 29 April 1944, AOR RG 38.
[198] Ibid.

escorts were insufficient, but this had worked for the British in the past. Besides, this was all Leatham had to spare.

Blame could also be assigned to Giddes and Moon. Giddes could have questioned someone higher in command about *Scimitar*'s situation, while Moon could have distributed his orders earlier and allocated more escorts for the convoy. Leatham, Giddes, and Moon may have possibly contributed to the disaster to the American convoy, but again, this was not the convoy's ultimate undoing.

Communication is an important aspect of naval warfare. The American convoy and its British escort did not establish control over their communications. Radio frequencies changed constantly because of the constant incoming and outgoing communication messages bombarding the message centers. Furthermore, with Normandy approaching, the Allies continuously changed radio nets and frequencies to prevent the Germans from discovering their intentions.

> Wireless communications were highly restricted. Everyone knew that they were to maintain radio silence except in the most desperate circumstances. Unnecessary communication would violate security and help the enemy locate shipping. The Allies knew that Germany's B-Dienst, its expert deciphering service, monitored all frequencies from listening posts at Dunkirk and the Isle of Jersey, looking for signs of unusual radio traffic.[199]

Because of the influx of both incoming and outgoing messages as well as the constant changes in communication orders, the Americans were somehow ill-advised of the communication change. The *American Heritage* article proposed that a typographical error caused the Americans to tune into the wrong communication frequency. It also

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[199] Tent, *E-boat Alert*, 13.

alleged that commander Skahill neither had copies of *Azalea's* escort orders or the task-force operations orders.[200] Whether this is true is unclear from the action reports.

In his deposition, Leatham argued that "the immense recent increase in communications arising largely out of" the fact that Plymouth had started preparations for Exercise Fabius as well as for another offensive operation against German destroyers "caused abnormal delays in the distribution in signals."[201] Regardless of the two offered arguments, the alleged typographical argument or the constant communication changes, the action reports reveal that the problem should have been corrected prior to the attack.

Doubtless, the most important aspect to naval warfare is command at sea, and two individuals, regardless of the problems created by the Plymouth command, made multiple command mistakes that sent the convoy directly into the lurking foxes. Their lack of action and decision-making resulted in the convoy's misfortune. Therefore, blame rests less at the top of Tiger's chain of command rather than further down the command ladder—with Commander Skahill and Lieutenant Commander Giddes. Communication or lack of escort protection did not fail the American convoy; it was instead a lack of leadership from both Giddes and Skahill and their unwillingness to act when command was most needed. Once action arose, these two individuals froze.

The major problem was communication between the convoy, its escort, and the Plymouth command. Following the disaster, Admiral Moon separately questioned Skahill and Giddes about the communication problem. Moon asked the commander and

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[200] Green and Allen, "What Happened."
[201] The C-in-C Plymouth to Naval Commander Western Task Force, Exercise Tiger, 5 May 1944, AOR RG 38.

the lieutenant commander if they met to discuss communication frequencies prior to the convoy's departure; both replied they had not. Forget the altered radio frequency argument or the supposed typographical error; the problem lay with Skahill and Giddes. In warfare there is no room for assumptions; once assumptions take the place of definites, problems are sure to arise. Unfortunately, both Skahill and Giddes assumed that each *was on the same radio* frequency as the other, unaware that the convoy possessed no means of communicating with its escort if the threat of danger appeared. Giddes had already assumed once (the *Scimitar* incident), but his second assumption proved detrimental.

Again, in his inquiry following the disaster, Moon received explanations from Giddes. Regarding the communication problem, Giddes explained to Moon that he never received any signals through wireless communication or by any signals from the American LSTs. Giddes believed that he could have reached the LSTs had he changed over to another frequency, but that meant he would have been unable to communicate with Plymouth. Moon also asked about the arrangements between Giddes and Skahill before the convoy's departure.

> RAdm. Moon: Q. Did you arrange for radio communication circuits with the Commanding Officer or the Convoy Commander?
>
> Lt. Cdr. Giddes: A. No, Sir.
>
> RAdm. Moon: Q. Did the Convoy Commander make any arrangements with you before departing port as to radio communications?
>
> Lt. Cdr. Giddes: A. No, sir, I joined the convoy in position after the convoy came out.
>
> RAdm. Moon: Q. Would it have been possible for you to have gotten together before and make arrangements?

Lt. Cdr. Giddes: A. Yes, sir, I think we could have contacted at the conference.[202]

Moon was also interested in Giddes' escort tactics. Giddes knew that E-boats were the main danger, but during his escort duty, the escort commander applied U-boat type tactics.

RAdm. Moon: Q. How far ahead of the convoy did you maintain station?

Lt. Cdr. Giddes: A. I was a mile ahead at the actual time of the attack.

RAdm. Moon: Q. Is that a normal distance to keep ahead?

Lt. Cdr. Giddes: A. I consider it is from the point of view of an attack from a U boat.

RAdm. Moon: Q. I infer that you consider your main menace was the U boat rather than the E boat?

Lt. Cdr. Giddes: A. No, sir, because around there the E boat is really expected, sir. We consider 2000 yards ahead ample to stop them from coming in to fire their torpedoes.

RAdm. Moon: Q. Do you have any special tactical instructions to cover E boat attacks?

Lt. Cdr. Giddes: A. Instructions are to eliminate them.[203]

Skahill and Giddes also failed to cooperate tactically once the attack occurred. LST action reports following the disaster indicated that the ships received no orders from Skahill regarding evasive action; the convoy maintained its course after seeing the multiple tracers, hearing the sounds of gunfire, and after seeing the first ship, LST 507, set ablaze. Skahill maintained the convoy's course based on *Azalea*'s movement and action. Thus, owing to *Azalea*'s movements, the convoy was unaware that it was under any immediate threat. By this time, however, *Azalea* had received information from Leatham and Plymouth that E-boats had escaped from Cherbourg and were heading

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[202] Transcript of Interview Between CTF 125 and Commanding Officer HMS Azalea, 29 April 1944, AOR RG 38.
[203] Ibid.

toward Lyme Bay.[204] *Azalea* knew something was amiss regarding communication with the convoy. Therefore, Giddes should have changed wave lengths to warn the Americans.

Giddes received the E-boat warning hours before the attack occurred.[205] Nigel Lewis, though, excused Giddes. Lewis argued that Giddes "was at the sharp end of a command confusion that was none of his making. Whose orders was he expected to attend to and obey? Rear Admiral Leatham's, from Plymouth? Bernard Skahill's, from LST 515? Rear Admiral Moon's, from the *Bayfield*?"[206] Lewis believed that Giddes did his duty and stuck to his orders. This, however, was not the case. Although Giddes was new to this type of escort duty, he had in his presence a major source—the E-boat warning message. He had every opportunity to warn the convoy—his convoy—in some manner of the imminent threat, either by changing communication lines or through the use of signal lamps. He did not act.

The blame should not rest entirely with Giddes. The Americans, especially Skahill, were the ones who were chiefly responsible. Bear in mind the Skahill was SOPA (Senior Officer Present Afloat) and it was his duty to protect the convoy. Did he? Absolutely not.

Skahill shouldered primary responsibility for the disaster. For example, the communication blunder resided with Skahill. Because he was the senior officer, it was his duty to confer with Giddes regarding communication frequencies. As the convoy

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[204] Transcript of Interview Between CTF 125 and Commanding Officer HMS Azalea, 29 April 1944, AOR RG 38; The C-in-C Plymouth to Naval Commander Western Task Force, Exercise Tiger, 5 May 1944, AOR RG 38.
[205] Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 129.
[206] Ibid.

leader he should have taken the initiative and met with the escort commander before the convoy's departure from Plymouth, not Giddes. If he took the initiative, then, and only then, would there have been no communication error. This meant that Skahill would have received the E-boat message from Plymouth. Therefore, he could have ordered his convoy to shore.

Another problem developed once the convoy witnessed the ominous flares and gunfire in the distant horizon (E-boats skirmishing with British ships). While Skahill might be excused for not reacting, once LST 507 and other LSTs came under E-boat gunfire and torpedo attack, the convoy continued to maintain its course. Lack of information led the convoy to assume that the flares and gunfire were part of the exercise. It was not until torpedoes struck LST 531, several minutes after the E-boat torpedoes struck LST 507, that the convoy began to disperse. Again, both Giddes and Skahill were guilty of making false assumptions.

Here, Skahill deserved more blame than Giddes. Skahill, although unable to communicate wirelessly or by radio with Giddes, could have contacted Giddes through signal lamps. Navies have used signal lamps throughout maritime history and since the Americans and British were unable to communicate through radio, signal lamps were the best alternative. Michael Palmer argued that to "ensure unity of action in the absence of wireless transmissions," navies used flags or lamps "to maintain radio silence while also giving the commander in chief better information about the size, location, and relative bearing of an approaching enemy force. . . ."[207] Skahill should have used signal lamps to

[207] Palmer, *Command at Sea*, 255.

communicate with Giddes about the situation occurring on the horizon. If Skahill had acted, then maybe Giddes would have finally informed him of the true situation, and Skahill would have ordered his convoy to shore. Now, some may say that this would have certainly given their position away, but this was the exact time to communicate—instead of maintaining the original course.

This was not the only time signal lamps should have been used. The Americans, too, failed to use signals. Once the E-boats attacked, each LST, especially the ones toward the end of the convoy, should have communicated with Skahill through signal lamps. With all of the events transpiring at the end of the convoy, some LST should have communicated ahead that they were under attack. Hopefully, at this point Skahill would have taken initiative and ordered the convoy to disperse.

Even after dispersing, though, the LSTs, if Skahill ordered them to scatter, had no exact location to rendezvous in case of an attack.[208] Instead of scattering as a group to a specific location, the LSTs individually steamed toward different positions, leaving each ship vulnerable to separate attacks. Again, this was Skahill's failure.

After the attack, Skahill himself thought that he made mistakes. He believed that he should have broken radio silence to inquire if the first ship ablaze was part of the convoy. Moreover, he stated that he should have given orders to the LSTs to scatter instead of entirely relying on visual and radar observation while ships scattered.[209] Skahill's ineffective decisions cost his convoy dearly.

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[208] U.S.S. LST 499, Report of Action between a Convoy of U.S. LSTs and Unidentified Enemy Vessel or Vessels on the night of April 27, 1944, and Early Morning of April 28, 1944, AOR RG 38.
[209] From LST Group 32 to COMINCH U.S. Fleet, Report of Action of 28 April 1944, 3 May 1944, AOR RG 38.

Who was ultimately responsible for the horrific accident and the tragic loss of so many American lives? First, consider the British—Ramsey's command structure, and the Plymouth command. Hoyt's *The Invasion Before Normandy* argued that the tragedy contained many errors. "Whether or not they could have been avoided" he argued, was "another matter. Given the frenetic pace of Allied preparations on the eve of the invasion of France, it is not so remarkable that errors were made, as that so few errors were made and so few lives lost in what some regarded as a 'useless' manner."[210] Hoyt added that "given the circumstances that prevailed, the tragedy probably could not have been avoided."[211] The British High Command, he argued, deserved some of the blame for the disaster, but "beyond that, what happened in Lyme Bay showed how hard it was for two separate national naval services to achieve the sort of cooperation on a tactical level that might prevent error. At the top all was serene. At the bottom all was confusion."[212]

Christopher Yung's *Gators of Neptune* explained that Ramsey's assembled command structure and Leatham's Plymouth command could possibly be blamed for the tragic incident. Yung, though, explained that these proposed scenarios were not feasible. First he excused Ramsey's command structure. Yung explained that according to "participant's action reports it is clear that one of the problems leading to increased vulnerability of the LST convoy was the absence of any direct communications between the escorts and the LSTs."[213] This, he argued, was "an interoperability, training, and

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[210] Hoyt, *Invasion*, 188.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid., 137.
[213] Yung, *Gators of Neptune*, 169.

communications problem, not a problem with the command and control of the forces involved."[214]

After dealing with Ramsey's command structure, Yung further argued that another problem was the multiple failures from Plymouth. Yung argued that the Plymouth command "was unaware that an LST convoy was under way; did not make the appropriate arrangements to replace one of the convoy's escorts that came in for repairs; and did not inform the LST convoy or any Allied shipping that there was a danger of E-boats in the operational area."[215] Regarding the communications failure, Yung explained this was a problem "having to do with the competency and effectiveness of a single command, not a problem related to the overall command arrangement and the Neptune plan in general."[216] Yung concluded that "while the events of the morning of April 28, 1944, say nothing about the effectiveness and quality of Ramsay's plan as a whole, those events do suggest that coordination of a high order was needed between the Royal and U.S. navies at the lower levels of command to make the ANCXF plan work—and this appears to not have been done for Exercise Tiger."[217] Again, the British high command made various mistakes, but they were not as costly as Giddes and Skahill's.

So who is more responsible—Giddes or Skahill? The extracts from Plymouth War Order 138 claimed the blame should rest on the shoulders of either communication headquarters, the commanding officer of the task force, and the Senior Officer of the

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[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Ibid., 169-170; ANCXF was the acronym for Ramsey.

escorts.[218] Besides the problems that occurred prior to the convoy's departure, Leatham and his Plymouth command did their job. Once they realized that the E-boats had penetrated the Cherbourg patrol screen, they quickly relayed the message to *Azalea.* Granted, Leatham could have used his overriding control, but he depended on his subordinates to do their job.

Both Skahill and Giddes did not execute their orders. For example, Giddes and *Azalea* had received information that E-boats had escaped from Cherbourg and were heading into the English Channel. Giddes, although there was radio silence, should have confirmed that Convoy T-4 received this warning. Granted, maintaining communication silence was important, but to overcome this obstacle Giddes and Skahill could have easily used signal lamps to communicate with each other, especially after observing strange tracers illuminating the night sky and particularly after LST 507 was hit. During wartime it is dangerous to make assumptions. Additionally, it was understood that the *Azalea* was the only escort protecting Convoy T-4, and it was *Azalea*'s job to protect Convoy T-4 from potential threats. Yet again, Giddes did not execute his orders. He failed to protect the Americans. It was Skahill, though, who in truth failed. As the convoy's senior officer, it was Skahill's duty to outline communication responsibilities before the convoy departed. It was Skahill and his American subordinates who failed in command.

Unarguably, at the bottom of the command chain there was mass confusion between the British and Americans. Indeed, Ramsey, Leatham, and the British High Command may deserve part of the blame, but, as the action reports indicated, Skahill and

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[218] Enclosure K, Extracts From Article 138, Reference (D), AOR RG 38.

Giddes had time to fix the mistakes before the convoy departed Plymouth. No communication problem would have existed had Skahill and Giddes communicated prior to the Convoy's departure. Granted, casualties occur in war, but disasters such as Exercise Tiger were avoidable.

The British were aware that German E-boats had escaped from Cherbourg, and the British headquarters identified the German E-boats well in advance to warn Convoy T-4 about the E-boat threat. Indeed, the British gave the Americans fair warning on the enemy's approach, but the communication error prevented communication between Convoy T-4 and their escort; Skahill deserved blame for this communication problem. Although the convoy and the escort were on separate radio communication lines, this would have been avoided had Skahill taken time to meet prior to the convoy's departure. If the Allies corrected the communication error, then, and only then, would the Exercise Tiger blunder have been prevented.

The months leading to Normandy were the first times the Allies had worked together on such a grand scale. Mistakes were expected. Mishaps occurred. The Tiger incident, though, should not have happened. Based on the action reports and multiple statements from individuals involved in Exercise Tiger, one could argue that Moon and Giddes should not have been given such important roles in the operation. Both were out of their element. Granted it was a practice exercise, but Normandy was more than a month away. Given the fact that Moon really had no amphibious experience, and Giddes had little experience with his escort duties in the English Channel, probably neither of them should have had such an important role.

The awful episode that occurred off the coast of England on the 28 April 1944 was a catastrophe that could have ***easily*** been avoided. Failed leadership decided the outcome of the E-boat attack and owing to vague command orders, questionable chain of command, lack of escort protection, ill-advised communication mishaps, but most importantly the individual failures of Skahill and Giddes, thus caused one of the worst naval blunders in World War II. Effective and decisive leadership are required qualities needed in individual officers. War has no room for indecisiveness. Sadly, the Exercise Tiger disaster epitomized a lack of essential leadership. Therefore, because of the multiple mistakes in the chain of command, especially the ones made by Giddes and Skahill, the Tiger disaster symbolized the impact individual decisions, or indecisiveness, have on warfare. Their roles and their individual mistakes doomed the American LSTs. These two men are forever linked to the Exercise Tiger disaster.

Exercise Tiger Chain of Command

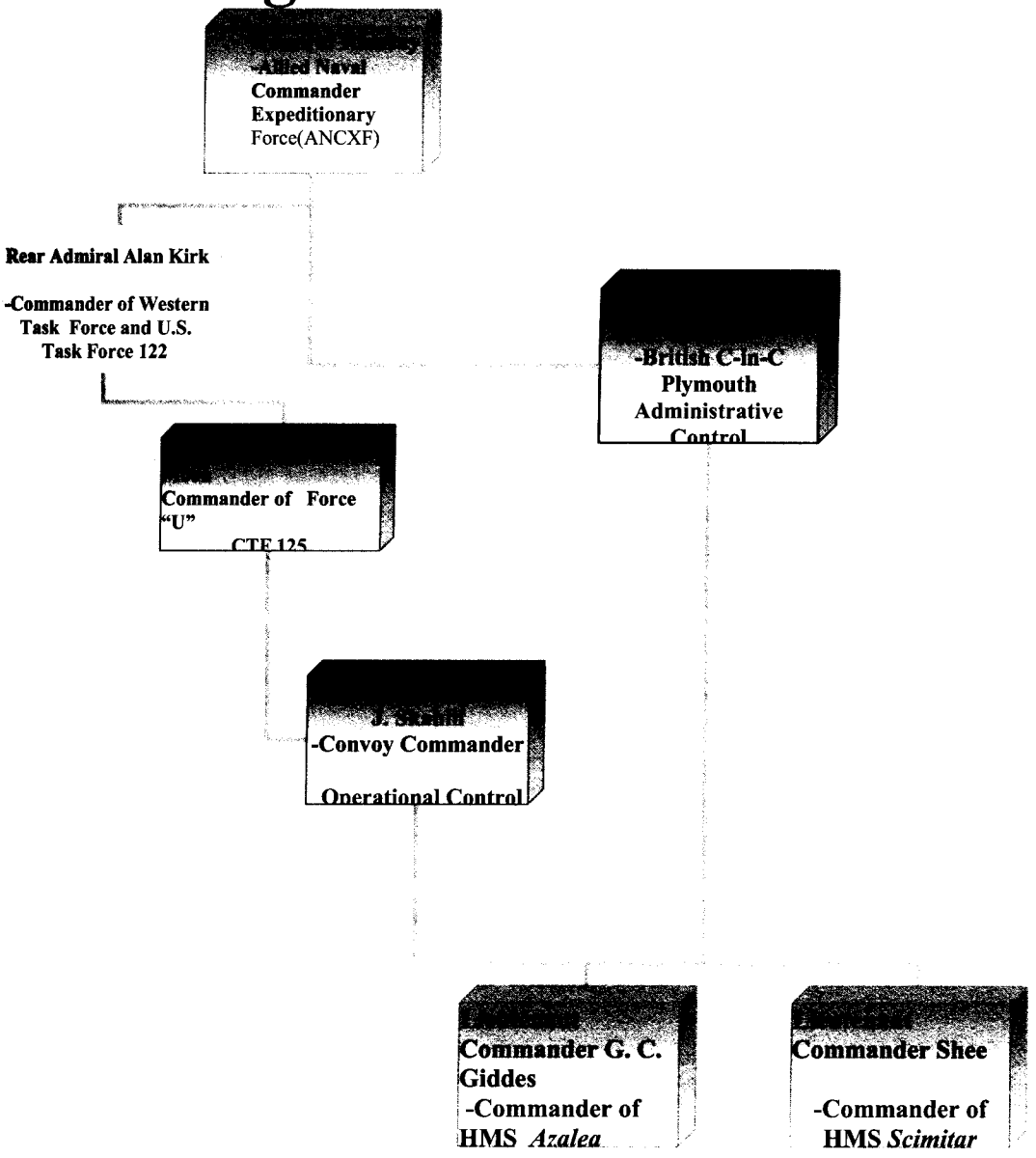

Figure #29. Exercise Tiger's Chain of Command
Source: WW II Action and Operational Reports, Action Report Commander LST Group 32, Commander Task Unit 125.11.4, serial 001, 3 May 1944, Exercise Tiger, box 674, 370/44/32/6.

C
O
P
Y

ADMIRALTY HOUSE,
DEVONPORT.

1st January, 1944.

My dear Admiral,

As operation Duck is the first large scale exercise undertaken by U. S. Forces in the Plymouth Command, I feel it is desirable to put on record my view of the relations in which you and I stand during the execution of the operation.

Broadly speaking I apply the customs and traditions of the British service, which I believe accord closely with yours. And I regard you in exactly the same light as any British flag officer in command of a British force operating within my command.

It is my conception, therefore, that from the time of leaving Falmouth you are in tactical control of your forces, including the British vessels forming the close escort.

Should I have any information of enemy attack by E-boat, submarine or air, it will be passed to you to take such action as you may think fit. I regard myself free to suggest action if necessary.

I consider it is within your discretion to modify or cancel the exercise on account of weather or other causes. I myself retain full control of the covering forces throughout the operation unless or until otherwise ordered. You will of course be kept informed.

I also retain an overriding control, should there arise circumstances which render it strategically necessary for me to cancel or curtail the exercise. I cannot at present see any likelihood of such circumstances arising.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

/s/ R. LEATHAM

Rear Admiral John L. Hall, Jr.,
U. S. S. Ancon.

NC (S)

Figure #30. Letter from Admiral Ralph Leatham to Rear Admiral John L. Hall
Source: Letter from Admiral Ralph Leatham to Rear Admiral John L. Hall, AOR RG 38.

CRET (D.25—550) 28-2-44

PLYMOUTH COMMAND WAR ORDERS
Short Title: "P. C. W. O."

Section 5—OPERATIONS

138 CONTROL OF FORCES ESCORTING AND COVERING U. S. TASK FORCES DURING AMPHIBIOUS EXERCISES

Information to be passed

Information of enemy activity of any nature in the vicinity of ships at sea is passed by the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, or the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Dartmouth, as soon as known. In the case of task forces the address of the signal will include the commanding officer of the task group and senior officer of the close escort.

Control of covering forces

2. Allied surface patrols and covering forces will be controlled in the normal manner by the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, or as directed by him (e.g. the Flag Officer-in-charge, Falmouth, or the Naval Officer-in-charge, Dartmouth).

Control of task force and close escort

3. The control of the task force and close escort will be carried out by the senior officer present whether British or American. The Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, may, however, suggest a course of action to the senior officer, task force, in the light of information at his disposal (from rader surface and air plots, etc.).

4. Assuming that the senior officer, task force, is the senior officer, the ose escort remains under his orders unless or until released by him.

Courses of action

5. There are two conditions to be prepared for:—
(a) When the task force is on passage.
(b) When the task force is actually conducting an exercise at the Slapton Assault Training Area between Dartmouth and Start Point.

Case (a)

6. The senior officer, task force, is responsible for ordering the movements of the task force and the close escort as may be necessary. He will give due weight to advice received from the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth (see para. 3 above).

Case (b)

7. In the event of enemy surface or submarine activity the senior officer, task force, will take his force as close inshore as possible, and will beach landing craft at his discretion if conditions are suitable.

8. He will form the close escort on a close screen round the task force.

9. Units of the task force and close escort will not proceed to seaward of QZS 440 and 416 unless in contact with enemy forces.

10. Units of covering forces will not proceed inshore of QZS 440 and 416 unless in contact with enemy forces.

nduct of close escort

11. In both cases (a) and (b) the close escort remains under the orders of the

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PLYMOUTH COMMAND WAR ORDERS
Short Title: "P. C. W. O."

senior officer, task force, until released by him. Should, however, the senior officer, task force, decide to detach any of the close escort (e.g. destroyers) in pursuit of the enemy or to effect an interception he should immediately place such vessels under the control of the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth. In the case of coastal craft being detached from the close escort they are to set W/T watch in accordance with D. C. O. 15, para. 14(b), and thereafter may be controlled by the Kingswear shore control station to intercept and attack.

Figure #31. Plymouth War Order 138
Source: Plymouth War Order 138, 28 February 1944, AOR RG 38.

Photo # 80-G-302423 Rear Admiral Don P. Moon, USN

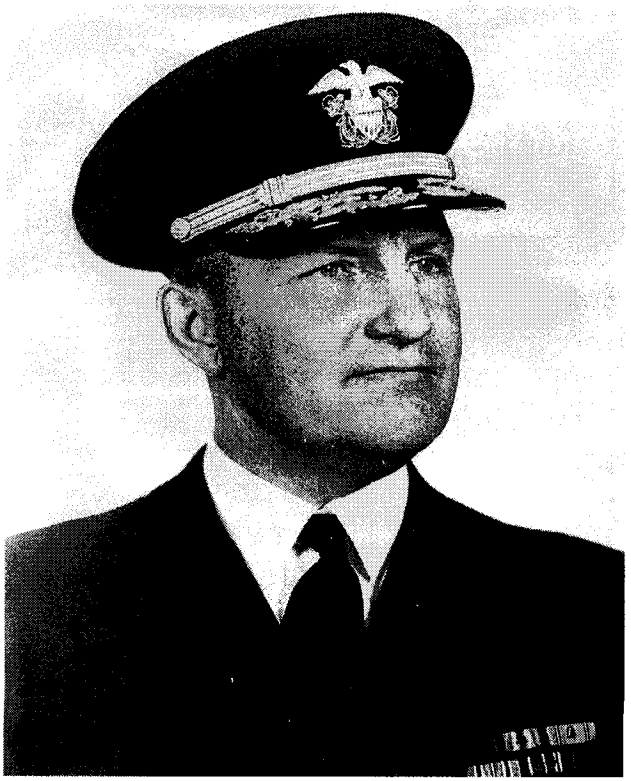

Figure #32. Rear Admiral Moon
Source: http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/pers-us/uspers-m/dp-moon.htm.

Photo # 80-G-250062 Rear Admiral Don P. Moon at Algiers, 24 March 1944

Figure #33. Rear Admiral Moon
Source: http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/pers-us/uspers-m/dp-moon.htm.

Published in 1913-out of 214 members: Fourth Class	
Sea service in practice ships: 2 months 21 Days	
Mechanical Drawing	**rank: 9**
Mathematics	**rank: 34**
English	**Rank: 9**
Modern Languages	**rank: 50**
Order of Merit	**rank: 14**

Published in 1914- out of 205 members: Third Class	
Sea Service in practice ships: 5 Months 20 Days	
Mechanical process and drawing	**rank: 15**
Elementary engineering	**rank: 8**
Mathematics	**rank: 16**
Electrical engineering and physics	**rank: 1**
English	**rank: 30**
Modern Languages	**rank: 26**
Efficiency	**rank: 76**
Practice cruise	**rank: 12**
Order of Merit	**rank: 6**
Number of demerits for academic year: 12	

Published in 1915- out of 199 members: Second Class	
Sea service in practice ships: 8 months 23 Days	
Ordnance	**Rank: 15**
Navigation	**Rank: 16**
Boilers and mechanism	**Rank: 12**
Engines	**Rank: 4**
Mechanics	**Rank: 7**
Electricity and magnetism	**Rank: 6**
Direct and alternating currents	**Rank: 3**
English	**Rank: 21**
Languages	**Rank: 16**
Efficiency	**Rank: 42**
Practice cruise	**Rank: 31**
Order of merit	**Rank: 7**
Number of demerits for academic year: 14	

Published in 1916- out of 178 members: First Class	
Sea service in practice ships: 8 Months 23 Days	
Seamanship	**Rank: 3**
Ordnance and ballistics	**Rank: 3**
Torpedoes and gunnery	**Rank: 2**
Navigation	**Rank: 12**
Compass deviation and surveying	**Rank: 1**
Turbines	**Rank: 5**
Naval construction	**Rank: 7**
Electrical engineering	**Rank: 1**
Modern languages	**Rank: 10**
Hygiene	**Rank: 17**
Efficiency	**Rank: 29**
Practice cruise	**Rank: 11**
Order of merit	**Rank: 1**
Number of demerits for academic year: 3	

Figure #34. Rear Admiral Moon's class rank, 1913-1916
Source: Alter and Crouch, *My Dear Moon*, Ch. 2, p. 10-11.

Don P. Moon's Decorations and Honors
Army Distinguished Service Medal (Normandy Invasion)
Legion of Merit (Planning for invasion of Southern France)
Commendation Ribbon (Performance in French Morocco/North African campaign)
Victory Medal Atlantic Fleet Clasp, with one star
The American Defense Service Medal, with bronze 'A'
American Area Campaign Medal with two stars
European-African-Middle Eastern Area Campaign Medal
World War II Victory Medal
Order of Alexander Nevsky (The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
The Legion d'Jonneur rank of Officer(awarded posthumously by the French Government)
The Honorary Distinguished Service Order (the British Government)

Figure #35. Rear Admiral Don Moon's medals and awards
Source: Alter and Crouch, *My Dear Moon*, Ch.2, p. 3.

Figure #36. Admiral Ralph Leatham
Source: http://www.unithistories.com/units_index/default.asp?file=../officers/personsx.html.

Date	Rank
30 March 1905	A/S Lt.
23 August 1906	S. Lt. (Seniority)
30 June 1906	Lt.
28 February 1907	Lt. (Seniority)
31 December 1917	Commander
31 December 1924	Captain
5 January 1936	Rear Admiral
1 August 1939	Vice Admiral
9 September 1943	Admiral

Figure #37. Leatham's rise through the Royal navy
Source: http://www.unithistories.com/units_index/default.asp?file=../officers/personsx.html.

Date	Significant Events
4 February 1898	Born in New York
20 July 1917	Entered Naval Academy (New York)
3 June 1921	Commissioned
1921-1923	Ensign
1924-1938	Lieutenant
1939-1943	Lieutenant Commander
1944	Commander
1 January 1947	Retired from U.S. Navy
13 April 1966	Died in Seattle, Washington

Figure #38. Commander Skahill's rise through the U.S. navy
Source: *Register of commissioned and warrant officers of the United States Naval Reserve* (1921-1944); Also came attained through email from the U.S. Naval Academy.

Date	Rank
June 1918	#616 out of 689 (present third class)
June 1919	#482 out of 628 (present first and second class)
June 1920	#43 out of 278 (present first class)
June 1921	#75 out of 260 (graduating class)

Figure #39. Skahill's rank at the U.S. Naval Academy
Source: Attained through email from the U.S. Naval Academy.

Chapter IV

Aftermath

On the Beach at Slapton Sands, unloading of troops and supplies continued from the time of the early morning landings. At about noon, Sergeant Barnett Hoffner and his 2nd Squad of B Company of the 203rd Engineer Combat Battalion were working down on the beach when he saw a group of men standing at the water's edge, gazing intently at something. He wandered down to the beach. There, just above the tide line, lay a body, and in the water a little beyond, another. Both bodies were clad in the fatigue uniforms of American troops.[219]

I could see that something or other was being ferried ashore and this was so unusual on that side of the island that I made a detour to take a look. It was a real shambles. Wounded young American soldiers were being brought up the beach on stretchers. It was an awful sight, their bodies torn and mutilated.[220]

We arrived in the area at daybreak, and the sight was appalling. There were hundreds of bodies of American servicemen, in full battle gear, floating in the sea. Many had their limbs and even their heads blown off, but some were still alive. . . . Small American landing craft with their ramps down were literally scooping up bodies, driving them ashore, and dumping them on the beaches. . . .[221]

On June 6, 1944, while the Allies were struggling to take the Normandy coast in Northwest France, President Franklin D. Roosevelt informed the American public of that morning's D-Day invasion. Roosevelt notified the public that "last night, when I spoke with you about the fall of Rome, I knew at that moment that troops of the United States and our Allies were crossing the Channel in another and greater operation. It has come to pass with success thus far."[222] Although ultimately the Normandy invasion was a resounding victory, only General Dwight D. Eisenhower and his Allied staff realized that the Normandy invasion, at least for several days following the E-boat disaster, had been in a state of limbo. Because of the Tiger tragedy, a select few in the know had new doubts about the impending invasion.

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[219] Hoyt, *Invasion,* 116-117.
[220] Quoted in Lewis, *Exercise Tiger,* 118-119.
[221] Quoted in Greene and Allen, "What Happened."
[222] Franklin D. Roosevelt, "D-Day Prayer," http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/fdr-prayer.htm. Accessed on 3 March 2006.

It took rescue ships several hours to arrive where the attack had taken place. The crews on the rescue ships encountered survivors clinging to floating debris, fighting hypothermia in the frigid 42° Fahrenheit temperatures for more than three hours until rescue ships arrived. If the soldiers did not die instantly from the impact of the blasts, they died from hypothermia or from fatal injuries in the military hospitals later that morning. Convoy T-4 lost several hundred men that night.

After word of the attack, panic overtook the Allied chain of command. Normandy was a little more than a month away and the Germans had attacked a significant practice operation. The surprise E-boat attack had sunk two LSTs, while an additional LST, though not sunk, was severely damaged. The attack left the Allies in a tight bind; they had already delayed the Normandy invasion for a month in order to obtain more LSTs. Moreover, weather reports indicated that the next possible opportunity for an Allied invasion would not occur until late June.

Although Eisenhower delayed the invasion from May to June to obtain more LSTs, and though the LSTs were vital to the Normandy invasion, Eisenhower could not delay the invasion any longer; they had to invade with the ships at their disposal. To overcome the loss of three LSTs, Eisenhower requested more LSTs from the Mediterranean theatre. Rear Admiral Bernhard Bieri, whom Admiral King had assigned to Eisenhower's staff, shifted three LSTs from the Mediterranean sector to the invasion fleet by 9 May 1944.[223] Also, Eisenhower received intelligence reports that suggested Hitler had already begun to strengthen the French coast with more German troops and

[223] Harry C. Butcher, *My Three Years With Eisenhower* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 535.

machinery, another indication that the Allies could not wait until late June and permit Hitler to fortify the Normandy coast. Although Eisenhower decided to not delay the invasion, he still had one concern: what had the Germans learned from their successful attack?

Besides the loss of several important LSTs, Exercise Tiger contained several invasion secrets that, if the Germans had captured any prisoners, or had recognized the Slapton Sands resemblance to the Normandy coast, then that would certainly have jeopardized the invasion plans. The Allies were concerned that the German E-boats had lingered after the attack to capture survivors. If captured, then there was a great possibility that the Germans could learn important invasion secrets. In the days following the incident, these and other Tiger questions needed to be analyzed in order for the Allies to understand the actual effect of the E-boat attack. Although some were quickly resolved, others would not be answered until Normandy.

In total, LST 507 and LST 531's records indicated that 744 army and 282 navy personnel were on board at the time of the attack; only 290 survived.[224] Initially, there were 447 men on board LST 507. LST 507's action report indicated that there were 165 navy personnel and 282 army on board during the E-boat attack.[225] LST 507 contained the following groups and machinery: "the 478th Amphibian Truck Company, the 557th Quartermaster Railhead Company, the 33rd Chemical Company, the 1st Platoon of the 440th Engineer Company, and the 3891st Quartermaster Truck company. On board were

[224] Cable CR 1032 ETOUSA to Fusa, 29 April 1944, ETO AG 354.2 files; Hoyt, *Invasion*, 118.
[225] Commanding Officer LST 507 to The Secretary of the Navy, Loss of Ship, Report of, 2 May 1944, AOR RG 38.

two ¼-ton trucks, thirteen 2 ½-ton trucks, and twenty-two amphibious DUKWs."[226] Of the navy personnel stationed on LST 507, ninety-four were rescued (five needed hospitalization), twenty-four reported missing, and forty-seven were pronounced dead. The army's casualty list was much higher than that of the navy personnel. Of the army's original 282, 151 were rescued (19 of these were hospitalized), while 131 were declared either missing or dead.[227]

At 2:18 a.m., on 28 April 1944, an E-boat attacked LST 531 on its starboard side with two torpedoes spaced a minute apart. At 2:24 a.m., the ship rolled over and the rest of the men abandoned ship.[228] Originally on board LST 531 were 142 navy and 354 army personnel. The ship also "carried the 462nd Amphibian Truck Company, the 3206th Quartermaster Service Company," and the same combination of machinery as LST 507.[229] Out of the 142 sailors listed, there were only 28 rescued (15 of these were hospitalized), and 114 were classified as dead or missing. The army's casualty list was far worse. From the original 354, only 44 men survived the attack; 10 of the 44 were

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[226] Hoyt, *Invasion*, 101-102.

[227] Commanding Officer LST 507 to The Secretary of the Navy, Loss of Ship, Report of, 2 May 1944, AOR RG 38. The figure 282 was given to Murdock by Captain Seibert, U.S. Army, senior army officer on board the LST 507. Seibert, though, did not survive the attack. Murdock's report stated that a soaked army roster that he took overboard showed 294 army personnel on LST 507. He believed, however, that Seibert's figure of 282 was the correct figure. Seibert told Murdock that he had left a list of the army personnel with the Hard Master at Brixham. Murdock also stated that he turned over the key of the ship's office to the ship's yeoman, to enable the yeoman to save the ship's records. Furthermore, the ship's quartermaster's note book was in the possession of the leading quartermaster just before abandoning ship. The Division Disbursing officer was attached to the LST 507, and one of the storekeepers took the records over the side with him. The yeoman and the senior quartermaster, however, were not rescued and neither were the records they possessed. Furthermore, Murdock explained that the records carried by the storekeeper were also lost.

[228] To: The Secretary of the Navy, From: Commanding Officer LST 531, Loss of Ship- report on, 2 May 1944, AOR RG 38.

[229] Hoyt, *Invasion*, 102.

hospital cases. Alas, 310 either perished or were reported missing.[230] Most of Exercise Tiger's casualties came from the supply units on board LST 531.

LST 289, though severely damaged, fared much better than her sister ships. After sustaining heavy damage to the stern of the ship, LST 289, no longer suitable to continue fighting, used evasive tactics and proceeded toward the nearest port. The preliminary casualty report on LST 289 was that the navy had four dead, eight missing, and eighteen wounded, while the army contained four wounded.[231] On board LST 289 were the "478th Amphibious Truck Company, the 556th Quartermaster Railhead Company," with twenty-two DUKWs, a 2 ½ ton truck, and one jeep.[232] LST 289 contained 395 army officers and an undisclosed number of navy men. The ship's casualties were four navy men killed, eight missing, and eighteen wounded. The army on board suffered far less. In total, the only victims from the army were the four wounded men.[233] The ship's wounded were stretcher cases, while fifteen to twenty navy personnel suffered minor wounds that did not require hospitalization. Of all twenty-two stretcher cases, only one stretcher case died, which demonstrated the excellent job done by the medical staff on board LST 289.

The ship limped toward Dartmouth, England, with assistance from British craft and one U.S. LCI until 1:00 p.m. Later, after attempts to tow the ship into port, a French tug came and brought the ship the rest of the distance.[234] While proceeding to

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[230] To: The Secretary of the Navy, From: Commanding Officer LST 531, Loss of Ship- report on, 2 May 1944, AOR RG 38.
[231] Naval Communication Service, From: CTF 125, Preliminary Report on 289, Record Group 407, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Entry 427, World War II Operational Reports.
[232] Hoyt, *Invasion*, 102; U.S.S. LST 289, Fleet Post Office, New York, Report of Action and Damage, 2 May 1944, AOR RG 38.
[233] U.S.S. LST 289, Fleet Post Office, New York, Report of Action and Damage, 2 May 1944, AOR RG 38.
[234] Ibid.

Dartmouth, Lieutenant Harry A. Mettler (USNR), the commanding officer, sent a signal through a British escort asking Dartmouth to prepare for the ship's casualties. The Dartmouth command, though, asked the ship to shift their route in the direction of Brixham instead of Dartmouth. Mettler objected to this request because he believed there were insufficient medical facilities at Brixham. Finally, the ship received permission to continue toward its original destination, and arrived at Dartmouth at 2:45 p.m.[235] Tiger's other casualties came from LST 496's accidental firing on LST 511, which left fourteen naval and four army personnel wounded; nine of the navy's wounded and all of the army's wounded were hospitalized at Portland British Naval Hospital.[236]

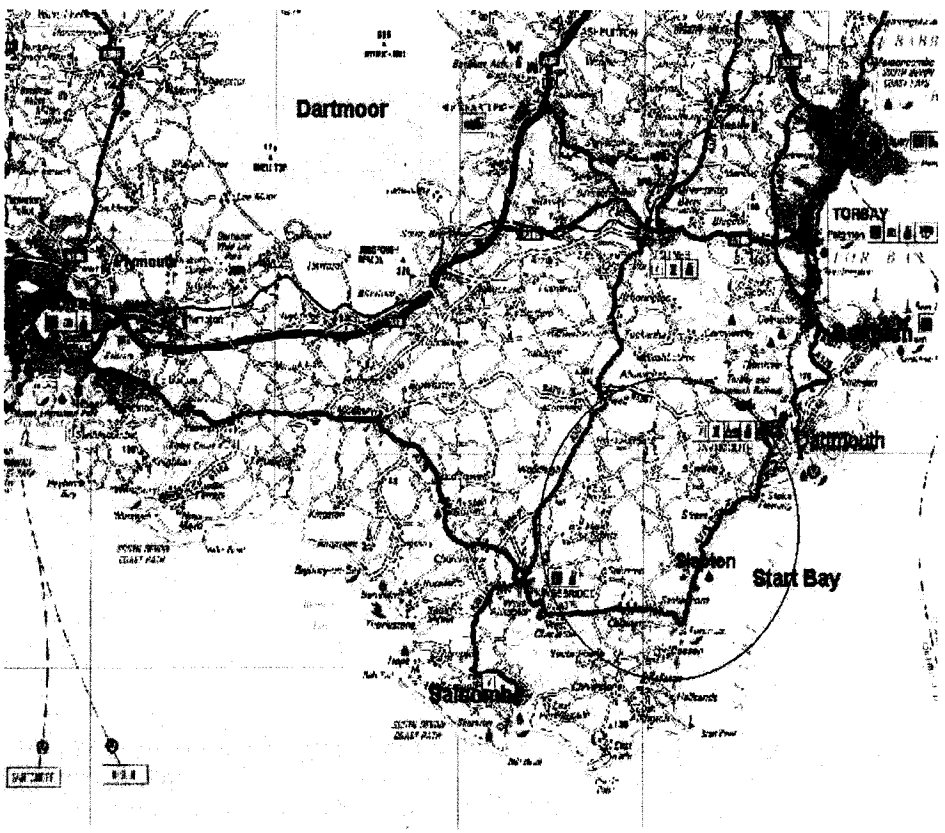

Figure #40. Slapton Sands Area
Source: http://www.mikekemble.com/ww2/tiger1.html.

[235] Ibid.
[236] LST 511's casualty report, Nominal Roll, 28 April 1944, Company "B" 261st Medical BN, AOR RG 38.

The unit that suffered the heaviest loss was the 1st Engineer Special Brigade, which listed 413 dead and 16 wounded.[237] Initially, the number of dead was believed to have been 142, with 16 wounded and 261 missing; on 8 July 1944, however, the status of 271 men who were reported missing in action was changed to killed in action. Thus, the unit lost a total of 403 men.[238] Other units that sustained heavy losses were the 3206th QM Service Company, which lost 201 killed or wounded of the original 251, as well as 69 casualties from the 557th QM Railhead Company.[239]

Casualties lay in the water hours before the first rescue ships arrived. At 4:42 a.m., three hours after the E-boat attack, LST 515, the command ship of Convoy T-4, was one of the first to return to the location where the battle had occurred three hours before. Afterward, at 5:00 a.m., H.M.S. *Onslow* arrived and engaged in screening and picking up survivors. It was soon followed by aircraft and other naval vessels. After hearing of the attack, air patrol searched the Lyme Bay area for survivors of LST 507 and LST 531 for as long as it was possible to rescue remaining survivors.[240] At 8:37 a.m., LST 515 headed toward Portland, England, with survivors and finally arrived at 11:50 a.m., with 14 litter and 118 ambulatory survivors. The ship also carried forty-five dead Americans.[241] LST 515 and other rescue ships found Lyme Bay scattered with debris and lifeless American soldiers. Those who were still alive were taken from the cold English

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[237] History of 1st Engineer Special Brigade, 8 November 1944, Enclosure 13; Ruppenthal, *The European Theater of Operations*, 352.
[238] History of 1st Engineer Special Brigade, 8 November 1944, Enclosure 13.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Naval Communications Service, From: CTF 125, Action: CINC Plymouth, Info: NOIC Portland/ CTF 122, Record Group 407, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Entry 427, World War II Operations Reports.
[241] LSTGr32/L11-1/P6-1, Report of Action on 28 April 1944, 3 May 1944, AOR RG 38.

water and sent to various English hospitals; most suffered from shock, hypothermia, or exposure.[242]

H.M.S. *Saladin*, the replacement escort sent to protect Convoy T-4, arrived at the scene at 3:15 a.m. After arriving, *Saladin* encountered about fifty survivors clinging to the bow of a destroyed LST and gathered them from the water.[243] Despite encountering many survivors in the water, *Saladin*, believing that its primary job was to continue to investigate the attack, determined it preferable to leave the survivors floating until daybreak.[244] By 4:40 a.m., *Saladin* ascertained through several reports that the E-boats had retreated back to Cherbourg, and therefore requested permission to pick up the remaining survivors. While *Saladin* was in the process of gathering survivors, LST 515 also returned to collect casualties. *Saladin*, therefore, decided to finish screening the area while small boats continued to pick up the rest of the survivors.[245] Moments later, *Saladin* found two more survivors clinging to the bow of one of the destroyed LSTs. Its personnel rescued the two survivors, then sank the bow of LST 531 with gunfire and depth charges. Eventually, Portland ordered *Saladin* to land with the survivors that she had rescued. In all, *Saladin* saved 129 survivors from LST 507 and LST 531.[246]

Events proceeded as survivors began arriving at the various military hospitals. The leading officials believed that it was not sensible to obtain accounts from the

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[242] Ibid.
[243] H.M.S. Saladin, Report of Proceedings, E-Boat Attack on Convoy T-4- Exercise Tiger, 29 April 1944, AOR RG 38.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid.
[246] Ibid.

survivors as "medical attention, feeding, and resting of survivors was given priority."[247] Before the arrival of the shocked survivors, the director of the military hospital briefed his staff on the situation in which they would soon participate. As the staff stood in front of Col. James Kendall, he told his staff that, "we are in the war at last. In less than an hour, we'll receive hundreds of emergency cases of shock due to immersion, compounded by explosion wounds." Kendall went on to say:

> SHAEF [Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force] demands that we treat these soldiers as though we're veterinarians: you will ask no questions and take no histories. There will be no discussion. Follow standard procedures. Anyone who talks about these casualties, regardless of their severity, will be subject to court-martial. No one will be allowed to leave our perimeter until further orders.[248]

Owing to the Normandy invasion and the secrecy surrounding it, the orderlies were instructed not to talk to any of the survivors. Following the incident, explicit orders from command demanded that the medical staff remain silent about their experiences during 28 April 1944. Moreover, to prevent any discussion from occurring during the treatments, the hospital was surrounded by "counterintelligence" troops carrying bayoneted rifles, deterring any discussion between the orderlies.[249]

Later that afternoon, because of the potential for another attack, Admiral Moon issued an order to all Allied vessels. The message read

> E-boat attack may occur tonight. All isolated vessels will close to within 3,000 yard circle from *Bayfield* prior to 2100 [9 P.M.]. After 2130 [9:30] all movement of craft must cease and unloading will be postponed until 290600 [April 29, 6 A.M.] Green Very star indicates an unidentified vessel is approaching anchorage. Red Very star indicates it is hostile craft. All ships will maintain alert and man half battery, and will report radar contacts of suspicious nature.[250]

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[247] To: Commanding Officer, Headquarters "D" Marshalling Area Headquarters, APO 155, U.S. Army, Report of Enemy Naval Action, 30 April 1944, V Record Group 407, Records of Adjutant Gen Office, Entry 417.
[248] Quoted in Greene and Allen, "What Happened."
[249] Ibid.
[250] Quoted in Hoyt, *The Invasion*, 118.

The next day, on 29 April 1944, SHAEF message control received an incoming stating that 248 dead Americans were sent to Brookwood Cemetery, while 253 patients were transferred to the Blandford hospital. At the same time, sixty-three were hospitalized in the vicinity of Dorchester. Twenty of the walking patients ford were interrogated on 29 April. Afterwards they were transferred to their tions.[251] According to U.S. Navy regulations, men who underwent the sinking ip were guaranteed thirty days reprieve. Generally, men who survived a naval ld anticipate several days at home with their family; Exercise Tiger's survivors an exception.

igel Lewis, author of *Exercise Tiger,* explained that this "survivor's leave," as it throughout the navy, were "the cherished rights" that men hoped to receive the sinking of their ship.[252] Lewis explained that most of the men were not ceive a leave of absence, but rather something similar to, as he described it, t."[253] The Normandy invasion was rapidly approaching and the Americans could little afford to send these men home to possibly reveal to the recent event their family and friends. It would have been disastrous if the Allies had let Tiger's survivors go home. There was no telling what the American press could have revealed to the Germans had survivors leaked their story. For the time being, the American public had to remain unaware of the Tiger tragedy. Any leak of the incident could have spelled disaster for the pivotal invasion.

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[251] SHAEF, Staff Message Control, Incoming Message, *REF NO: 13592, 29 April 1944, RG 331.*
[252] Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 120.
[253] Ibid.

The next day, on 29 April 1944, SHAEF message control received an incoming dispatch stating that 248 dead Americans were sent to Brookwood Cemetery, while 253 walking patients were transferred to the Blandford hospital. At the same time, sixty-three casualties were hospitalized in the vicinity of Dorchester. Twenty of the walking patients at Blandford were interrogated on 29 April. Afterwards they were transferred to their home stations.[251] According to U.S. Navy regulations, men who underwent the sinking of their ship were guaranteed thirty days reprieve. Generally, men who survived a naval battle could anticipate several days at home with their family; Exercise Tiger's survivors would be an exception.

Nigel Lewis, author of *Exercise Tiger,* explained that this "survivor's leave," as it was known throughout the navy, were "the cherished rights" that men hoped to receive following the sinking of their ship.[252] Lewis explained that most of the men were not going to receive a leave of absence, but rather something similar to, as he described it, "house arrest."[253] The Normandy invasion was rapidly approaching and the Americans and British could little afford to send these men home to possibly reveal to the recent event their family and friends. It would have been disastrous if the Allies had let Tiger's survivors go home. There was no telling what the American press could have revealed to the Germans had survivors leaked their story. For the time being, the American public had to remain unaware of the Tiger tragedy. Any leak of the incident could have spelled disaster for the pivotal invasion.

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[251] SHAEF, Staff Message Control, Incoming Message, REF NO: 13592, 29 April 1944, RG 331.
[252] Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 120.
[253] Ibid.

Angelo Crapanzano, who worked in LST 507's engine room, was one of the many wounded. In an interview with Ralph Greene, Crapanzano remembered talking to his buddy years after the incident. During the attack, Crapanzano's friend, who was on board the command ship LST 515, was sent below deck with the rest of the army personnel and told by other officers that they neither heard nor saw anything. His comrade remembered that the next day the commanding officer told the soldiers that "nothing happened last night. Remember. Nothing happened."[254] After rescue, Crapanzano, suffering from hypothermia and shock, was sent to one of the military hospitals and treated for his injuries. After recovering, Crapanzano, aware of "survivor's leave" regulations, at first believed that he would be sent home. He learned, though, that he was not going home any time soon. Crapanzano explained:

> We all knew that you have to get survivor's leave. So after we're there three weeks, this same guy, Murdoch, he was the executive officer, he comes out one morning and lines us all up, and he's got papers. I said to the guy next to me, 'This is it. We're going back to the States.' So he starts reading names off, he says, 'You guys are all petty officers, and all experienced, all went to Navy schools, and you're all going to be reassigned to LSTs to make the invasion of Normandy.' I could feel my blood getting cold. 'They've gotta be kidding.' I said, 'What the hell are they trying to do, kill us? Chrissakes, its only three weeks ago we were out there, and now we're gonna go back? I couldn't believe it.[255]

Ewell Lunsford, who was on board LST 289, was a supply sergeant in Company B of the 4th Medical Battalion. Lunsford reiterated Crapanzano's story. "Nothing was ever said about it," he began, "but when they took us ashore, they marched us way back out in those woods, away from everything. They wouldn't let us talk to anybody. We were all split up on this maneuver, and our company didn't even know where we

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[254] Angelo Crapanzano, interviewed by Ralph Greene, "Tiger Burning," 2 May 1994, http://www.tankbooks.com/amile/crapanzano/crapanzano1.htm, accessed 3 May 2006.
[255] Ibid.

were."[256] Moreover, "they wouldn't let anybody see us or talk to us or anything for about a week or two, and then they sent us back to our company."[257]

The chain of command, as well they should, feared that if they sent these men back to the United States, word of the Tiger disaster would spread throughout the American public, thus unveiling the tragedy and, with it, the invasion scheme. At the same time as the casualties were sent to various hospitals, the men who were not wounded were separated from one another and quarantined. Arthur Victor, a navy medical corpsman, recalled that, "we were taken to an army base and counted in. Then the army boys went one way and we went the other. We were taken to another area and housed in a dilapidated barracks, under guard, for three days, and ordered, under threat of court martial, not to discuss the incident with anyone outside of our immediate group."[258]

Usually, after the death of an American soldier, the family is soon notified of the loss of their family member. Ordinary military procedures, however, would not take precedent over the secrecy of the Normandy invasion. Thirteen days after the incident, 11 May 1944, a message was sent to Eisenhower explaining that the "relatives of 200 Army personnel are being notified of casualty status, most of them being missing, wounded or dead near England 28 April."[259] The message suggested that "limited announcement there of ship lost and total of personnel dead or missing would remove prospective pressure for information or undue comment."[260]

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[256] Drez, *Voices*, 34.
[257] Ibid.
[258] Quoted in Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 121.
[259] SHAEF, Staff Message Control, Incoming Message, REF NO: N34801, 11 May 1944, RG 331.
[260] Ibid.

Three days later Eisenhower and his staff responded. On 14 May 1944, Eisenhower ordered that the "Supreme Headquarters strongly recommends against release at this time of information concerning ships lost and casualties sustained 28 April 1944 for security reasons."[261] At that time, Eisenhower had to seal the information about the tragic occurrence in Lyme Bay. Again, Normandy was approaching and Eisenhower could not afford a security breach. Too much planning and preparation had taken place to let an Allied blunder, although tragic, prevent the Allies from executing the invasion they had planned for many years. Additionally, the Allied staff did not know the extent of the information that the Germans had ascertained from the incident. Therefore, Eisenhower, with his staff's approval, prevented the publication of the casualty list.

Ironically, Eisenhower and his staff had observed Exercise Tiger at almost the same location where the subsequent E-boat attack took place.[262] Eisenhower first heard about the incident during the late afternoon of 28 April 1944. Captain Harry C. Butcher, a member of Eisenhower's staff, explained,

> As the day closed, I was in Ike's office when Beetle [Walter Beetle Smith, Eisenhower's chief of staff] phoned on the intercommunication system to say that by E-boat action last night, we had two LSTs sunk and one damaged in the exercise. This happened off Lyme Bay—just where we had been. Casualties are estimated at 300 to 400. Beetle said this reduces our reserve of LSTs for the big show to zero. Ike told Beetle to get off a cable to the Combined Chiefs advising them of the loss.[263]

The next day Eisenhower sent a brief letter to General George C. Marshall. Within the letter, Eisenhower addressed the Exercise Tiger situation. Eisenhower wrote:

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[261] SHAEF, Staff Message Control, Outgoing Message, Ref NO: E-27684, Too: 131706Z, 14 May 1944, RG 331.
[262] *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years,* vol 3 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 1839; Butcher, *My Three Years*, 528.
[263] Butcher, *My Three Years*, 531.

> Night before last German E-Boats sneaked into one of our harbors and sank three of our LSTs. Apparently we lost a considerable number of men. I got the news just as I was finishing a long hard day and I must say it was not a restful thought to take home with me. We are stretched to the limit in the LST category, while the implications of the attack and the possibility of both raiders and bombers concentrating on some of our important ports make one scratch his head.[264]

Eisenhower's letter to Marshall demonstrates the concern Eisenhower felt following the Tiger accident. Evidently, Eisenhower was concerned not only about the loss of so many American lives, but also with the loss of the LSTs. From his letter to Marshall, it is apparent that the LSTs were a vital component to the Normandy invasion. Every LST was important to the invasion and now the Allies were stretched to their limit. Eisenhower's choice words demonstrated that the loss of the three important LSTs devastated him. With Normandy looming he was already under enough pressure.

By 9 May 1944, Eisenhower had learned the full extent of the Tiger tragedy. Butcher wrote that he had found "the casualties much higher than first stated; between 750 and 800."[265] Butcher further explained that lack of "signals prevented a Royal Navy destroyer from accompanying the convoy. There were expressions of concern by Americans and British, both Army and Navy, whom I met on the trip. It was an unfortunate mix-up of orders and a sad fate for many fine lads."[266]

General Bernard Montgomery, a member of Eisenhower's staff and head of the Normandy ground forces, was also in a state of alarm after hearing of the attack. Convoy T-4 contained ten BIGOT officers who were informed of the secret invasion plans. Ralph Ingersoll's *Top Secret* summed up the Allied classification system.

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[264] *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, 1838-1839.
[265] Butcher, *My Three Years*, 535.
[266] Ibid.

> All information which might be of value to the enemy is divided into classifications and as you go up the ladder—from RESTRICTED to CONFIDENTIAL to SECRET and higher—fewer officers and men have access to or are indoctrinated in the knowledge which you want withheld from the enemy. In operations in Europe, the U.S. SECRET classification was the equivalent of the British MOST SECRET. After 'U.S. SECRET equals British MOST SECRET' came TOP SECRET, which contained the precise plans of the invasion, including the organization of the assault waves and the arrangement of the supporting weapons—but neither the time nor the place where the actual invasion was to take place. This last information was reserved for still higher classification which was known as BIGOT. An officer who was entitled to, and did, know when and where the invasion would happen was known as a Bigoted individual.[267]

Only a select few knew where and when the Normandy invasion would take place; ten of these BIGOT officers were on board Convoy T-4. The British Admiralty believed that because the American convoy had not yet participated in the exercise, but were instead on their way to Slapton Sands, they concluded that the American BIGOT officers would not have revealed their secret information to their troops. If the Germans had attacked the Americans after they had participated in Tiger, "every GI onboard would have been worth sending to Berlin for his interrogation—he would have been stuffed so full of TOP SECRET information."[268] Montgomery had yet another concern—the BIGOT officers—and whether or not the Germans had captured any of these officers from LST 507 or LST 531. Moreover, there were important government documents, publications, records, and accounts on board the LSTs. The possibility of captured prisoners troubled Montgomery, as did the fear that the Germans had captured secret invasion documents, records, publications, and accounts that were on the sunken LSTs. On 2 May 1944, the commanding officer of LST 531 revealed in his action report that no

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[267] Ralph Ingersoll, *Top Secret* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946), 104.
[268] Ibid.

government property, documents, records, or accounts were saved in the surprise attack.[269] Montgomery feared the worst.

Ingersoll served in the strategic and tactical planning of the Normandy campaign. According to Ingersoll, "There was a whole day… when it was seriously contemplated trying to alter the operation [Neptune] because of the knowledge which the enemy must now be presumed to have—the detailed knowledge of almost everything we planned."[270] Ingersoll further explained:

> We asked ourselves why the Germans had chosen this moment to make their raid and the answer was obvious. It was to take prisoners who could tell them how we planned to attack. The exercise concerned was the first which involved a full rehearsal of the actual assault formation that would be employed. It was complete with such secret weapons as rocket boats and DD amphibian tanks. . . . These secret DD tanks were always kept covered under black shrouds, even in convoy. . . . The $64 dollar question: had the E-Boats taken any prisoners and, if so, what did these prisoners know?[271]

As stated in previous chapters, the Allies were aware of E-boat tactics. They knew the ships were fast, maneuverable craft constructed for quick hit-and-run tactics. They understood that the ships' objectives were to quickly engage and attack the enemy, and then immediately depart. Nevertheless, following the attack, Ingersoll, a lieutenant colonel who took part in Montgomery's Tiger investigation, had learned from two lieutenants from another LST that possibly one German E-boat had prowled through the waters with a search light, attempting to capture any survivors.[272] After attacking one of the LSTs, the lieutenants alleged the E-boat "hove to in the dark waters a hundred yards away and then had the cheek to turn on its searchlight. This played over the bobbing

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[269] To: The Secretary of the Navy, From: Commanding Officer LST 507, Loss of Ship- Report of, 2 May 1944, AOR RG 38.
[270] Ingersoll, *Top Secret*, 105.
[271] Ibid., 103.
[272] Ingersoll, *Top Secret,* p. 105; Anthony C. Brown, *Bodyguard of Lies* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 547-548.

heads of the survivors struggling in the water. The E-boat cruised about through the survivors and finally slipped away into the darkness."[273] Ingersoll concluded that there was ample time to capture prisoners.[274]

Now the "hunt was really on."[275] General Betts, deputy chief of intelligence at SHAEF, and Colonel Gordon Sheen, chief of the SHAEF security branch, wanted every man accounted for, whether missing or dead. Betts and Sheen "went among the oil-soaked survivors at dawn with a list of the Bigots who had taken part in the exercise. One by one they were all accounted for, but there were still a large number of missing men who had *some* knowledge of Neptune's secrets."[276] Thus, "divers and frogmen swam down to the wrecks, entered the compartments, wriggled between the sunken tanks, and brought up the identity discs of the corpses they found."[277] The Allied staff was relieved once the investigation revealed that all ten BIGOT officers died in the attack.

General Omar N. Bradley shared Montgomery's concerns. Bradley, one of the leading officers on Eisenhower's staff, also worried about the possibility that E-boats had captured American survivors. After being briefed of the situation, Bradley wrote:

> Meanwhile G-2 was growing uneasy. If survivors of the sinking were to be picked up by the S-boats [E-boats], the enemy might learn how imminent the invasion was. Deception had been working on a plot to mislead him [Germans] into thinking it would come in mid-July. Fortunately those troops had not yet been briefed and the secret of where we would strike was presumably still safe. But with this misfortune, the enemy might learn *when* we planned to strike. I now shared G-2's worries.[278]

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[273] Ingersoll, *Top Secret*, 105.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Ibid.
[276] Brown, *Bodyguard of Lies*, 548.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier's Story* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1951), 248.

In the weeks following Tiger, because there was no talk of the incident, Bradley's worries were alleviated. He concluded "that the loss of life had been slight" and "that there was little likelihood of the enemy having learned anything from it.[279]

David Eisenhower's *Eisenhower at War; 1943-1945,* also depicted the absolute apprehension that consumed the Allies following the catastrophe. Eisenhower claimed rumors swirled throughout the Allied chain of command that after torpedoes struck LST 507 and LST 531, several German E-boats had cut off their engines and captured an undisclosed amount of American prisoners.[280] Sheer panic consumed the leading Allied officials for two days following the attack because two of the known BIGOT officers on board the sunken LSTs were still missing. Therefore, SHEAF enforced censorship on the incident, preventing the Germans from realizing their actual destruction.[281]

In the weeks following the incident, the Allies' ultimate fears intensified. Because of the Tiger disaster, Ultra, the Allies' source for deciphering German messages, discovered that the Germans were increasing their strength around the Normandy coast. In Harry C. Butcher's diary, dated 18 May 1944, he wrote that the Germans were broadcasting that the invasion would come "any day now."[282] Actually, to the Allies' alarm, Germany began enhancing their Normandy defenses, which were relatively at low strength compared to the rest of the northern French coast. Anthony Brown's *Bodyguard of Lies* explained that it was "only a week after the Tiger calamity that Hitler issued his

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[279] Ibid.
[280] David Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War; 1943-1945* (New York: Random House, 1986), 220.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Butcher, *My Three Years*, 542.

command instruction to watch Normandy."[283] One reason, the head officials believed, that Hitler shifted his focus towards Normandy was because of the information that the Germans had received from Tiger. Now, Eisenhower and his staff gambled and hoped the Germans had learned nothing from their destruction. Later, after the war had ended and the Americans had captured valuable German documents, the Allies learned that the reason for Hitler's speedy build up of the Normandy coast line was not the result of the Tiger blunder, but because of a special German intelligence group, Funkabwehr, a group that frequently broke poor American radio communications.[284]

Following the conclusion of Exercise Tiger, Collins, Moon, and others who participated met and discussed the problems that occurred. General Collins started the meeting saying:

> Gentlemen, as we said at out last conference, our last critique, these critiques are only of value in my opinion if we are very frank with one another, not only in the things we have done well, but in pointing out those things which have gone wrong. The sole purpose is to point out those mistakes which were made this time and correct them the next time.
>
> As I said before, I am going to ask you not to be too sensitive, we are not trying to pin anything on anyone. Our aim is to try and find out the reason why things went wrong.[285]

During the meeting Admiral Moon briefly brought up the E-boat attack. Within his statements, Moon highlighted a grim picture for the Americans in future operations; his statements seemed very pessimistic following the attack.[286] Moon maintained that he briefed his naval officers about the E-boat threat and warned them of potential E-boat activity. Regardless of his warnings, the E-boats escaped the Cherbourg patrol screen

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[283] Brown, *Bodyguard of Lies*, 548; Hoyt, *Invasion*, 163.
[284] Brown, *Bodyguard of Lies*, 549.
[285] Transcript of Assessment Following Exercise Tiger, RG 407, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Entry 427, World War II Operational Reports.
[286] Ibid.

and succeeded in destroying three LSTs. Specifically regarding Normandy, Moon argued that few lessons were learned in Exercise Tiger.[287] Nonetheless, Moon warned of the possibility that the Allied forces could face the E-boats in the future, and suggested that the Allies pursue the E-boats aggressively in order to remove the serious menace for the safety to future operations.[288]

Admiral Kirk agreed. On 6 May 1944, Kirk sent a letter to Admiral Ramsey urging him to attack the E-boats in Cherbourg.[289] Two days later Eisenhower and Ramsey discussed Kirk's E-boat letter. After Eisenhower asked Ramsey's opinion of Kirk's suggestion, Ramsey responded that he "'took the E-boat threat seriously but he believed 'it would be a mistake to overestimate it.'"[290]

Ramsey argued against Kirk and Moon's proposal for the following reasons. First, Ramsey believed that attacking the E-boat centers would "involve unjustifiable risk of bombarding ships which, if lost or damaged, would reduce forces allocated to covering the assaults."[291] Next, he believed "security would be endangered as the proposed bombardment would indicate the possible locality of the assault."[292] Lastly, Ramsey argued that "the E-boat menace could be adequately dealt with by existing weapons, if handled with more efficiency and alertness."[293] Ramsey and the British were aware and

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[287] Ibid.
[288] From: Commander Task Force 125 To: CinC U.S. Fleet, Action Between LST Convoy and Enemy E Boats, 6 May 1944, AOR RG 38.
[289] Yung, *Gators of Neptune*, 118.
[290] Ibid.
[291] US Navy, *Invasion of Normandy*, 382.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Ibid.

experienced the brunt of the E-boat's wrath. Simply stated, Ramsey and his staff underestimated the E-boat potential.

Following the Tiger disaster, the Allies never attacked the E-boat sites until the invasion, thus ignoring Moon's and Kirk's suggestions. Once the Normandy invasion was underway, however, because of constant, menacing E-boat operations against Allied ships, the Allies began an aggressive campaign to thwart the only major threat against the Allied navy.[294]

In the aftermath, Moon received blame from Rear Admiral Arthur D. Struble. Struble, who became Rear Admiral Alan Kirk's Chief of Staff in 1943, vehemently attacked Moon. John Moreno, a member on Moon's staff, remembered the incident between Struble and Moon very well. Moreno recalled that Struble, after summoning Moon to his cabin, was at the window at the time Moon entered. Upon Moreno's arrival he remembered that a British submarine had just entered the port and Struble pompously stated: "Well at least someone did his duty!"[295] Moreno explained that it was with this incident that Moon began to lose it. "I think that was the instant that Moon's mind snapped. He couldn't give a clear explanation of what happened because at that time no one really knew."[296] Moon knew that the Americans had lost two ships as well as several hundred casualties, but was unaware at that time of the full extent of the attack. Moreno explained that Struble "made some remark to the effect that Admiral King (in Washington) would be greatly concerned about it and that was the end of the meeting."[297]

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[294] Tent, *E-boat Alert*, 131.
[295] Alter and Crouch, *My Dear Moon*, Ch. 5, p. 13.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Ibid.

Moreno said that he got Moon off the ship as quickly as he could. "Dinner that night," Moreno stated, "was a disaster. There were only three or four of us at the Flag Mess and Moon was clearly out of his mind."[298]

After Normandy, Admiral Ernest J. King, U.S. Fleet Admiral, recommended Moon assist Vice-Admiral Kent Hewitt in preparing for amphibious operations for *Anvil*, the invasion of southern France. King stated "he had been impressed with his amphibious expertise. Disregarding objections that Moon was needed at Normandy, King made his decision without fully considering the consequences."[299] King was unaware that his decision would result in tragedy. King believed Moon was "a perfectionist who worried too much and failed to delegate authority. He arrived in the Mediterranean in the midst of hasty planning and preparations and succumbed to strain and overwork."[300] Moon seemed incapable of dealing with drastic change, especially under immense pressures. His inability to relegate authority possibly cost him his life. In August 1944, months after the E-boat attack, Moon killed himself shortly after his transfer to the Mediterranean. Moreno believed Moon's reaction to the attack "was to be greatly disturbed. He never got over it and it was the direct cause of his subsequent suicide."[301]

Following Moon's death, General Collins wrote to Moon's wife explaining his sorrow for her loss. The stress and pressure that Moon faced during the Utah Beach landings appeared in Collins' letter. Collins wrote that Moon "was a casualty of this war

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[298] Ibid.
[299] Thomas B. Buell, *Master of Sea Power: a biography of Admiral Ernest J. King* (Boston: Little Brown, 1980), 434.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 147.

just as much as if he had been killed in action."[302] Collins understood the pressure that Moon faced in preparing for Exercise Tiger and the Navy's role in the landings at Normandy. He also recognized the effect that the Tiger disaster had on Moon's psyche, which probably, as Collins himself stressed, resulted from Moon's inability to delegate responsibility to his subordinates.[303] Collins explained that Moon "worked long hours, and because of lack of experience of many of his subordinate commanders and staff, he had to take upon himself a large share of the burden."[304]

Neither Skahill nor Giddes, although they should have been, were ever court-martialed. Following the disaster, Admiral H. R. Stark, on 19 May 1944, and Rear Admiral Eric J. P. Brind, on 7 August 1944, concluded through separate inquiries that none of the individuals involved in the blunder would be court-martialed.[305] Even so, Skahill and Giddes' command failures proved costly for the Allies in the initial days and weeks following Exercise Tiger. Because of their actions, or lack their of, the Allies lost two LSTs and, because of the Tiger tragedy and the secrets that it contained, Eisenhower and his staff scrambled for days trying to determine the amount of information that the Germans had possibly uncovered. For several days following the incident, the Allies wondered about the possible discovery of Normandy's secrets, leaving the invasion, at least for a couple of days, temporarily in doubt. It would not be until the Normandy invasion that the Allies would determine the amount of secret information that the Germans had uncovered from the Tiger incident. Luckily for the Allies, the Germans did

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[302] Alter and Crouch, *My Dear Moon*, Ch. 12, p. 7.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 147-148.

not take advantage of their surprise attack. If the Germans had, then the outcome of the Normandy invasion could have been altered.

Figure #41. Almost a month after the attack. Rear Admiral Moon, General Omar Bradley, and Rear Admiral Kirk on board the U.S.S. *Augusta*
Source: From the U.S. Naval Memorial Foundation Collection: Lester C. Haas Papers, Collection No. 677/80. East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J.Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C.

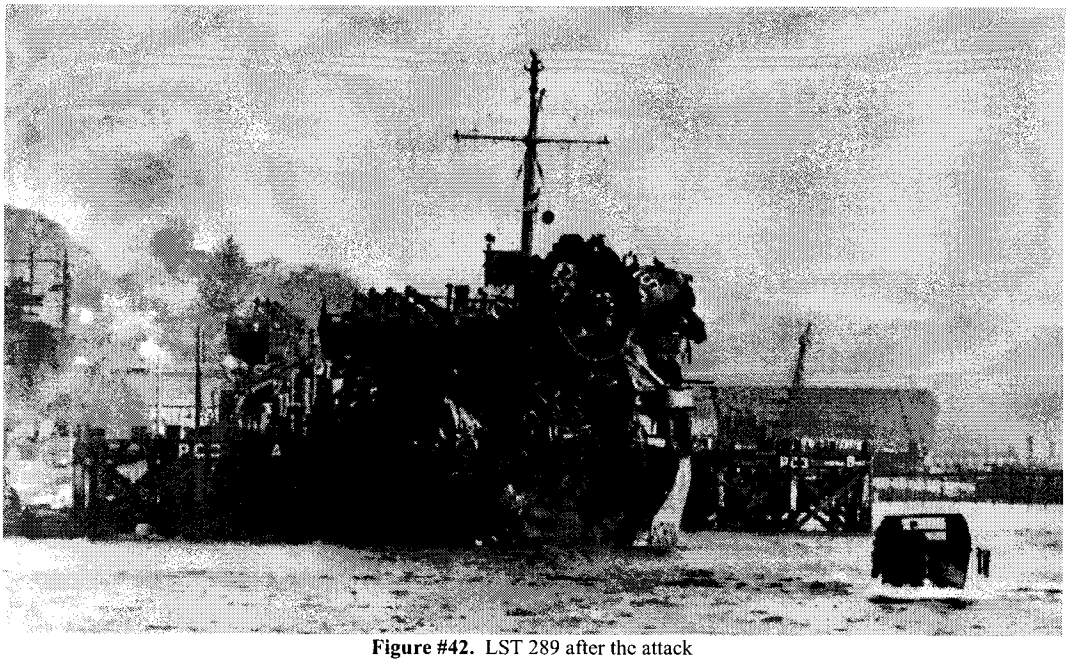

Figure #42. LST 289 after the attack
Source: http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/16/160289.htm.

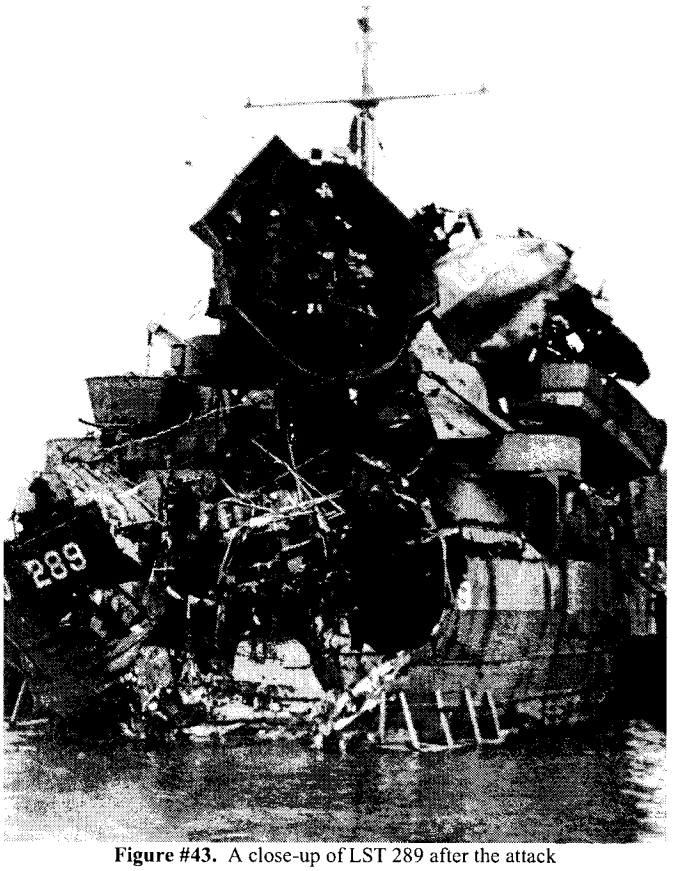

Figure #43. A close-up of LST 289 after the attack
Source: http://www.navsource.org/archives/10/16/160289.htm.

U.S.S. LST 289

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

MEN KILLED IN ACTION

GRIFFIN, Joseph W.	607 66 80	SK2c
NEFF, Harold A.	942 98 57	S2c
ROBERTS, Clifford L.	875 50 78	GM3c
SHIPP, John L. Jr.	659 79 44	S1c

MEN MISSING IN ACTION

BROSKE, Mitchell L.	807 27 14	GM3c
CHANDLER, James W.	256 74 87	GM2c
FRAZIER, Walter H.	603 78 89	S2c
HACKES, Mike G.	712 01 76	S2c
HARVIE, James H.	806 02 82	S2c
KORTENHORN, Herman R.	868 31 11	F1c
MAY Robert M.	657 87 98	S2c
MULLER, William C.	825 52 93	S2c

MEN WOUNDED IN ACTION

MUZA, Earl V.	869 53 48	S2c (Died in hospital)
BARTLETT, Fred S.	608 83 42	SC2c
BRITTON, Benjamin F. Jr.	556 26 90	F1c
DRAGOS, George Jr.	651 82 03	MoMM3c
FREDERICK, Gerald E.	758 65 42	S2c
FREEMAN, Harold E.	829 79 40	S2c
GIGLIUTO, Dominic A.	808 16 93	S2c
GINOUARD, Normand (n)	823 95 86	S2c
HANSON, Harry W.	639 92 63	F1c
HARRISON, James (n)	939 88 29	STM3c
JACKSON, James (n)	832 07 49	STM2c
KEYES, Russell L.	853 45 54	Cox
MATTHEWS, Wallace R.	829 62 81	Cox
NEVILLE, Lonnie R.	657 88 63	S2c
PRICE, David H.	657 88 51	S2c
RASH, Bristol Lee	829 98 23	S1c
WARD, Frank C.	656 02 19	SC1c
SHAEFFER, Roger Platt	270 207	Ensign

ARMY MEN WOUNDED IN ACTION

ASHWAY, Elmer B.	O-439817	Captain
DAMACH, Walter E.	O-1102687	1st Lieutenant
BREKKE, Raymond A.	37020957	PFC
MORROW, Stanley A.	244337792	PVT

Figure #44. LST 289's casualty list
Source: LST 289, Report of Action and Damage, 2 May 1944, AOR RG 38.

SECRET

NOMINAL ROLL 28 APRIL 1944 COMPANY "B" 261st MEDICAL BN. LST #511

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NAME & GRADE		ORGANIZATION	ASN.	DIAGONOSIS	TREATMENT	DISPOSITION
Behuniak, John NMI	Pfc	261st Med.Bn.Co."B"	31106386	WIA-GSW(20mm) Lt. ankle	Sulfa Powder Dr. TT ice 0305 hrs	LST 511 Hosp.
Schultz, Frank	S2c	LST 511	817 17 09	WIA -GSW(20mm) Lt. hip	Sulfa Powder Dr. TT ice 0300 hrs	Duty & then Hosp.
Sobers, Mervin H.	Pvt.	261st Med. Bn Co. "B"	36863793	WIA-GSW(20mm) Lt. Ankle, Rt. Heel	Sulfa Powder Dr. TT ice 0330 hrs	LST 511 Hosp.
Wolbach, Marvin	S2c	LST 511	249 99 61	WIA-GSW (20mm) Pen. W. Lt.Shoulder	Sulfa Powder Dr. TT ice 0245 hrs.	LST 511 Hosp.
Blazer, E. H.	Cox	LST 511	244 09 62	WIA-GSW(20mm) Lt.chest, Lt.hip	Sulfa Powder Dr. TT ice 0310 hrs.	LST 511 Hosp.
				Lt. testicle, Both hands, Lt.Shoulder	Morph 1gr. 0310 hrs.	
Davis, James L.	S2c	LST 511	653 97 12	WIA-GSW(20mm) Lt.side of face	Sulfa Powder Dr. TT ice 0345	LST 511
Gallagher, Fred NMI	SK2c	LST 511	607 61 41	WIA-GSW(20mm) Lt. thigh lt. leg	Sulfa Powder Dr. TT ice 0345 hrs	LST 511 Hosp.
Williams, W. J.	S1c	LST 511	807 94 56	WIA-GSW(20mm) left elbow	Sulfa Powder Dr. TT ice 0440 hrs.	LST 511 Hosp.
Downey, George E.	SM3c	LST 511	225 39 99	WIA-GSW(20mm) left thigh	Sulfa Powder Dr. TT ice 0450 hrs	Duty & then to Hosp.
Wolf, Calvin M.	S2c	LST 511	245 94 71	WIA-GSW(20mm) rt. shoulder	Sulfa Powder Dr. TT ice 0325 hrs	LST 511 Hosp.
Marquez, Leo NMI	Pvt.	261st Med. Bn Co. "B"	39135614	WIA-GSW(20mm) Pen W. abdomen	Sulfa Powder Dr. TT ice 0240 hrs. Morph. 1gr 0240	LST 511 Hosp.
Eddy, John W.	Lt(jg)LST 511, Executive		665 23 33	WIA-GSW(20mm) lt. eye, max. sinus Pen. W.	Sulfa Powder Dr. Morph. 1gr. 0230 hrs	LS. 511 Hosp.
Yacevich, J.	Lt.(jg)	LST 511	238 36 11	WIA-GSW(20mm) rt. leg and foot	Sulfa powder Dr.	Duty
Olsen, Arthur C.	Pfc	261st Med. Bn. Co."B"	32317366	WIA-GSW(20mm) left leg	Sulfa Powder Dr. TT ice Morph 1gr. 0230	LST 511 Hosp.
Fern, William E.	HA2c	LST 511	250 91 44	WIA-GSW (20mm) Powder burns of both hands, legs	Sulfa Oint. Dr.	LST 511 Duty
Tremain, Harry C.	Ensign Comm. Officer	LST 511	187 656	WIA-GSW(20mm) Pen W. rt. forearm, lac. rt. side, scrotum	Sulfa Powder Dr. TT ice 0325 hrs.	LST 511 Hosp.

SECRET

COMPANY "B" 261st MD BN NOMINAL ROLL 28 APRIL 1944

Page 2 of 2 Pages

NAME	GRADE	ORGANIZATION	ASN	DIAGONOSIS	TREATMENT	DISPOSITION
Sanders, R. C.	StM2c	LST 511	631 19 00	WIA-GSW shell W.(20mm) lt. cheek	Sulfa Powder	Duty
Durbin, Daniel	HA2c	LST 511	855 87 05	WIA-GSW Powder Burns both hands and thighs	Sulfathiazole Oint Dr.	Duty

Navy wounded 14
Army wounded 4
Total wounded 18

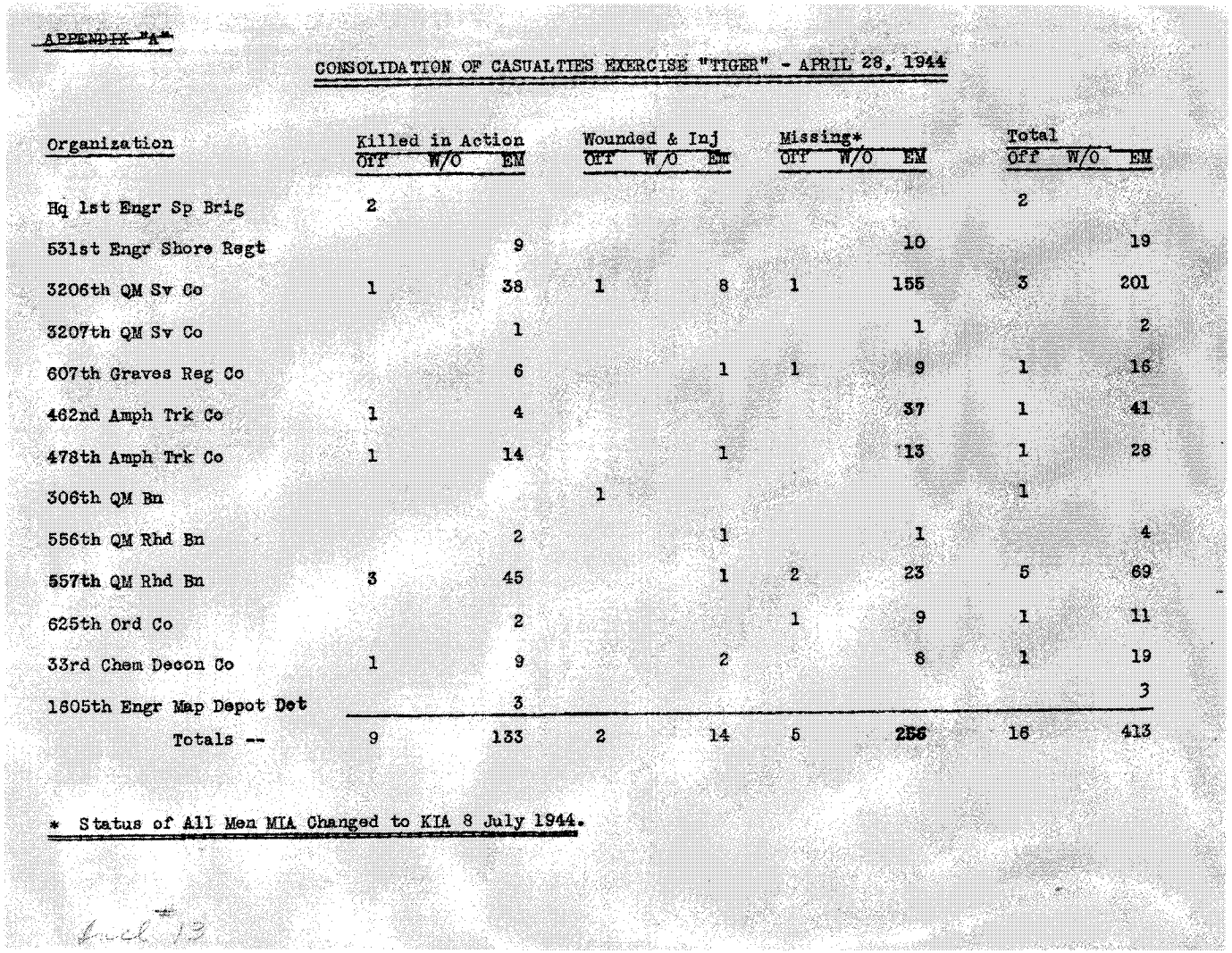
Navy hospitalized 9
Army hospitalized 4
Total hospitalized 13

PORTLAND BRITISH NAVAL HOSPITAL

/s/ John E. Burns
John E. Burns
Capt. MC
Commanding, Co. B, 261 Med. Bn.

/s/ N. Burleson
N. Burleson
Lt.(jg) MC USNR

Figure #45. LST 511's Casualties
Source: LST 511, Report of Action Taking Place Morning of 28 April 1944, 30 April 1944, AOR RG 38.



APPENDIX "A"

CONSOLIDATION OF CASUALTIES EXERCISE "TIGER" - APRIL 28, 1944

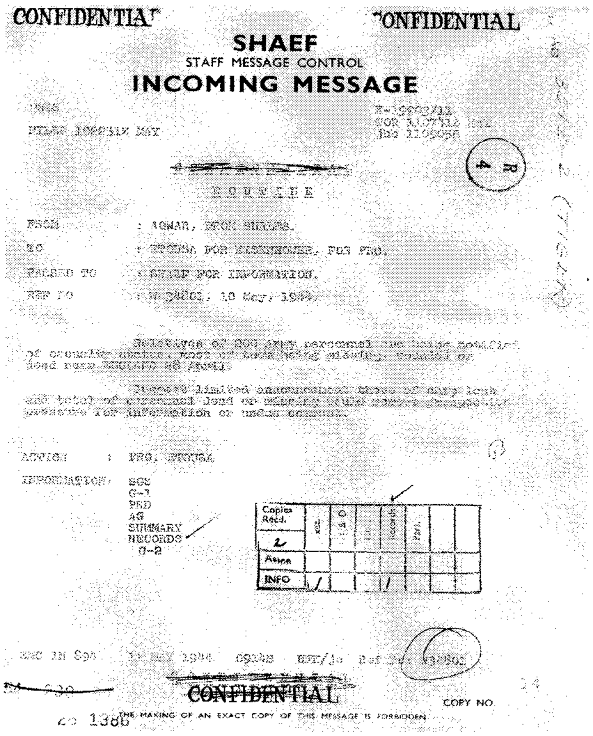
Organization	Killed in Action			Wounded & Inj			Missing*			Total		
	Off	W/O	EM	Off	W/O	EM	Off	W/O	EM	Off	W/O	EM
Hq 1st Engr Sp Brig	2									2		
531st Engr Shore Regt			9						10			19
3206th QM Sv Co	1		38	1		8	1		155	3		201
3207th QM Sv Co			1						1			2
607th Graves Reg Co			6			1	1		9	1		16
462nd Amph Trk Co	1		4						37	1		41
478th Amph Trk Co	1		14			1			13	1		28
306th QM Bn				1						1		
556th QM Rhd Bn			2			1			1			4
557th QM Rhd Bn	3		45			1	2		23	5		69
625th Ord Co			2				1		9	1		11
33rd Chem Decon Co	1		9			2			8	1		19
1605th Engr Map Depot Det			3									3
Totals --	9		133	2		14	5		256	16		413

* Status of All Men MIA Changed to KIA 8 July 1944.

Incl #3

Figure # 46. 1st Engineer Special Brigade's Casualtics from Exercise Tiger

Source: 1st Engineer Special Brigade, ENBR-1-0, History 6 Dec 43-1 Nov 44, box 19038, 270/62/8/3, RG 407.



CONFIDENTIAL CONFIDENTIAL

SHAEF

STAFF MESSAGE CONTROL

INCOMING MESSAGE

ROUTINE

FROM : AGWAR

REF NO : W-34801, 10 May, 1944

ACTION : PRO, ETOUSA

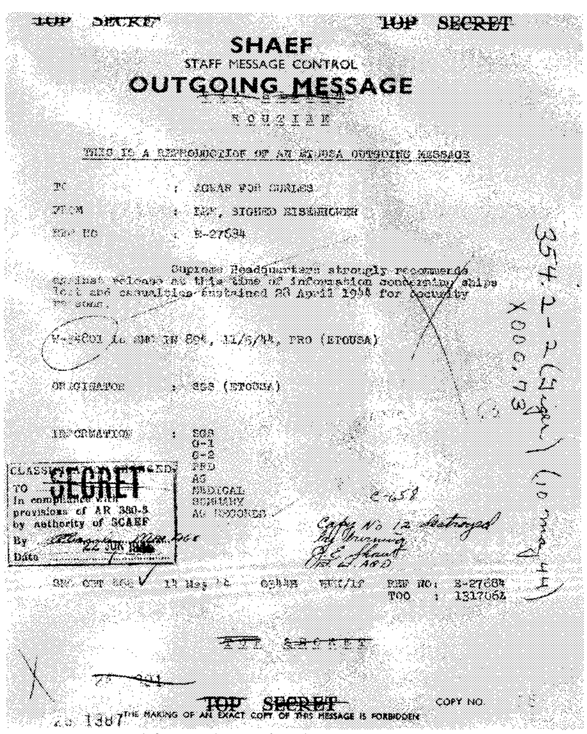
INFORMATION: SGS
G-3
PRD
AG
SUMMARY
RECORDS
G-2

CONFIDENTIAL

COPY NO.

THE MAKING OF AN EXACT COPY OF THIS MESSAGE IS FORBIDDEN

Figure # 47. Suggested announcement of Tiger's dead
Source: Record Group 331, Records of Allied Operational and Occupation Headquarters, World War II, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force.



TOP SECRET TOP SECRET

SHAEF

STAFF MESSAGE CONTROL

OUTGOING MESSAGE

ROUTINE

TO : AGWAR FOR SURLES

FROM : SIGNED EISENHOWER

REF NO : S-27684

Supreme Headquarters strongly recommends against release at this time of information concerning ships lost and casualties sustained 28 April 1944 for security reasons.

W-34801 is SMC IN 894, 11/5/44, PRO (ETOUSA)

ORIGINATOR : SGS (ETOUSA)

INFORMATION : SGS
G-1
G-2
PRD
AG
MEDICAL
SUMMARY
AG RECORDS

CLASSIFICATION CHANGED TO SECRET In compliance with provisions of AR 380-5 by authority of SCAEF
By
Date 22 JUN 1945

REF NO: S-27684
TOO : 131706Z

TOP SECRET

COPY NO.

THE MAKING OF AN EXACT COPY OF THIS MESSAGE IS FORBIDDEN

Figure #48. Eisenhower's message
Source: Record Group 331, Records of Allied Operational and Occupation Headquarters, World War II, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Cover-up: An effort or strategy of concealment, especially a planned effort to prevent something potentially scandalous from becoming public.[306]

Blunder: A usually serious mistake typically caused by ignorance or confusion.[307]

After the Americans and British had a foothold on Normandy, the Allies released information about the Exercise Tiger mishap. On 5 August 1944, SHAEF released press release number seventy-seven, which listed all Allied servicemen killed, American, British, and Canadian, from 6 June 1944 (Normandy) to 20 July 1944, totaling 70,009 men. The bottom of the press release acknowledged the figures also included the casualties from Exercise Tiger: Killed in Action (KIA) 130, Wounded in Action (WIA) 41, Missing in Action (MIA) 312.[308]

Unquestionably, the number of men killed in the E-boat attack has been an ongoing debate amongst scholars. Nigel Lewis, for example, believed the number of dead was lower than 700 while others, like Charles B. Macdonald, a retired deputy from the army, believed that the death toll reached 946 dead—749 soldiers and 197 sailors.[309] A major problem was that LST 507 and LST 531's records were lost in the attack, thus it was incredibly hard for scholars to uncover the number of Americans killed in the

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[306] cover-up. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition.* Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/cover-up (accessed: January 18, 2007).

[307] blunder. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition.* Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/blunder (accessed: January 18, 2007).

[308] SHAEF, Entry 83D, Public Relations Division, Executive Branch, Box 30, File: Press Releases, No. 77, 5 August 1944, 290/8/2/3, RG 331.

[309] "Ceremony Honors 749 D-Day Rehearsal Dead," Entry 83D, Public Relations Division, Executive Branch, Box 30, File: Press Releases.

disaster. The exact number of Americans that died that fateful night will forever be unknown.

Following SHAEF's release of Exercise Tiger's casualty list, *The Stars and Stripes*, the United States Army military journal, released information on 8 August 1944 about Exercise Tiger. Next, in 1974, almost thirty years later, the United States government passed the Freedom of Information Act, which unveiled once undisclosed documents to the American public. Finally, the top secret Tiger files were opened to the public and the concealed Allied blunder, with the cloud of secrecy surrounding it, had been disclosed.

Although information about Exercise Tiger was now public, Exercise Tiger remained an insignificant footnote in World War II scholarship. It was not until the mid-1980s that the American public was informed of the events that transpired in Lyme Bay during the early morning of 28 April 1944. Once the Exercise Tiger story broke in the mid-1980s, however, false accusations of Eisenhower and the Allies conspiring to create a cover-up began filtering into the media's coverage. Looking at the unclassified documents, though, the words "cover-up" or "conspiracy" does not necessarily come to mind—only a tragic blunder that could have ultimately been avoided had command not failed and the necessary precautions been taken. Besides, information about the disaster appeared in official histories and secondary sources soon after the war. Granted, information on the disaster did not make the major headlines after the war, and maybe it would have been hard for the average lay person to discover the Tiger incident, but historians who wrote during the initial decades following World War II had available

resources at their disposal to research and uncover the incident—they only needed to know where to look.

The Allies did not conceal the tragedy. Ken Small, author of *The Forgotten Dead,* explained that "Exercise Tiger was kept highly secret at the time; it had to be. People have said it was a cover up. I am not so sure that a cover up—with all its Watergate connotations—is quite the right word. But what did happen was that it was forgotten; it was not spoken about."[310]

Probably the best argument against the conspiracy accusation, however, came in Carlo D'Este's *Eisenhower.* D'Este argued:

> Nearly forty years later the actions of several well-meaning but misguided individuals led to a rash of media coverage, most of which suggested that there had been a cover-up of the tragedy. In fact not only was there no cover-up by Eisenhower or anyone else, but accounts of Tiger appeared in numerous postwar publications, including the official histories of the army and navy. Unfortunately the tragedy of the most deadly training accident of World War II was eventually tarnished by an unseemly feeding frenzy in both the print and television media in Britain and the United States, most of which inaccurately alleged a cover-up and indifference on the part of the U.S. Army to the fate of the dead.[311]

Thus, the cover-up accusation is frivolous at best. Eisenhower had to conceal the clash between the LSTs and the German E-boats because the Allies were about to embark on the crucial invasion. Eisenhower and his staff had planned a lavish invasion that was based on secrecy. It was in the best interest for the Allies not to publicize the events that transpired in Lyme Bay because the invasion plans could have been revealed, and the Allies exposed. Eisenhower was worried about the possibility that the German E-boats had captured survivors and had taken them back to France. There were ten men on board the torpedoed LSTs that had been briefed about the impending Normandy invasion.

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[310] Ken Small, *The Forgotten Dead* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988), 6.
[311] D'Este, *Eisenhower*, 516.

Eisenhower's immediate fear was that these men had been picked up by the Germans, but, as stated in the previous chapter, they were among the many that drowned soon after the torpedo attacks.[312] Also, the Germans could possibly decipher the area of Slapton Sands and its resemblance to Utah beach.

Eisenhower could not afford to report on the Slapton Sands incident because the Normandy invasion depended on the surprise element. The Germans knew that an invasion would commence on the French coast, and the Germans understood that the Allied invasion would embark from England. If Eisenhower had revealed the information about the Exercise Tiger episode, the Germans would have possibly recognized that the naval vessels destroyed in the Lyme Bay area were part of a practice operation designed for the "big show."

The term blunder is a better representation of the Tiger tragedy. On 10 May 1944, thirteen days after the E-boat attack, Admiral Kirk wrote that "while training in these waters has now been finished, the fact remains that this engagement developed deficiencies which must be corrected prior to pending events."[313] He further argued that "although risks in training had to be accepted, it is regretted that in this case [the E-boat attack] there appear to have been incurred some risks that were preventable."[314] Although Edwin P. Hoyt argued that the disaster was inevitable. Evidence from the LSTs' action reports and war diaries, documents and orders supplied from both the

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[312] Charles B. MacDonald, "Slapton Sands," http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq20-2.htm, accessed 3 October 2005.
[313] From: United States Fleet Task Force One Two Two, To: Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet, Action Between LST Convoy and Enemy E Boats, report concerning, Second Endorsement, 10 May 1944, AOR RG 38.
[314] Ibid.

Americans and British, transcripts from the British escorts, and oral histories suggested that the disastrous incident was preventable.

Bungling command determined Tiger's outcome. Adrian Lewis' *Omaha Beach: A Flawed Victory* correctly argued that despite multiple flaws within the Allies' invasion plans, the dependency on surprise and air power while ignoring the importance of persistent naval bombardment, certain individuals (notwithstanding all the chaos on Omaha) successfully commanded the Americans to victory. Warfare depends on individual leaders and the decisions they make—ill-advised decisions and mistakes cost lives. Decentralized command only worked if the subordinates were well-trained and had the capacity to make effective decisions under the most intense situations. If the subordinates lacked initiative, or stumbled in battle, then the most likely outcome would be a catastrophe for the ships afloat—the Exercise Tiger blunder was a prime example.

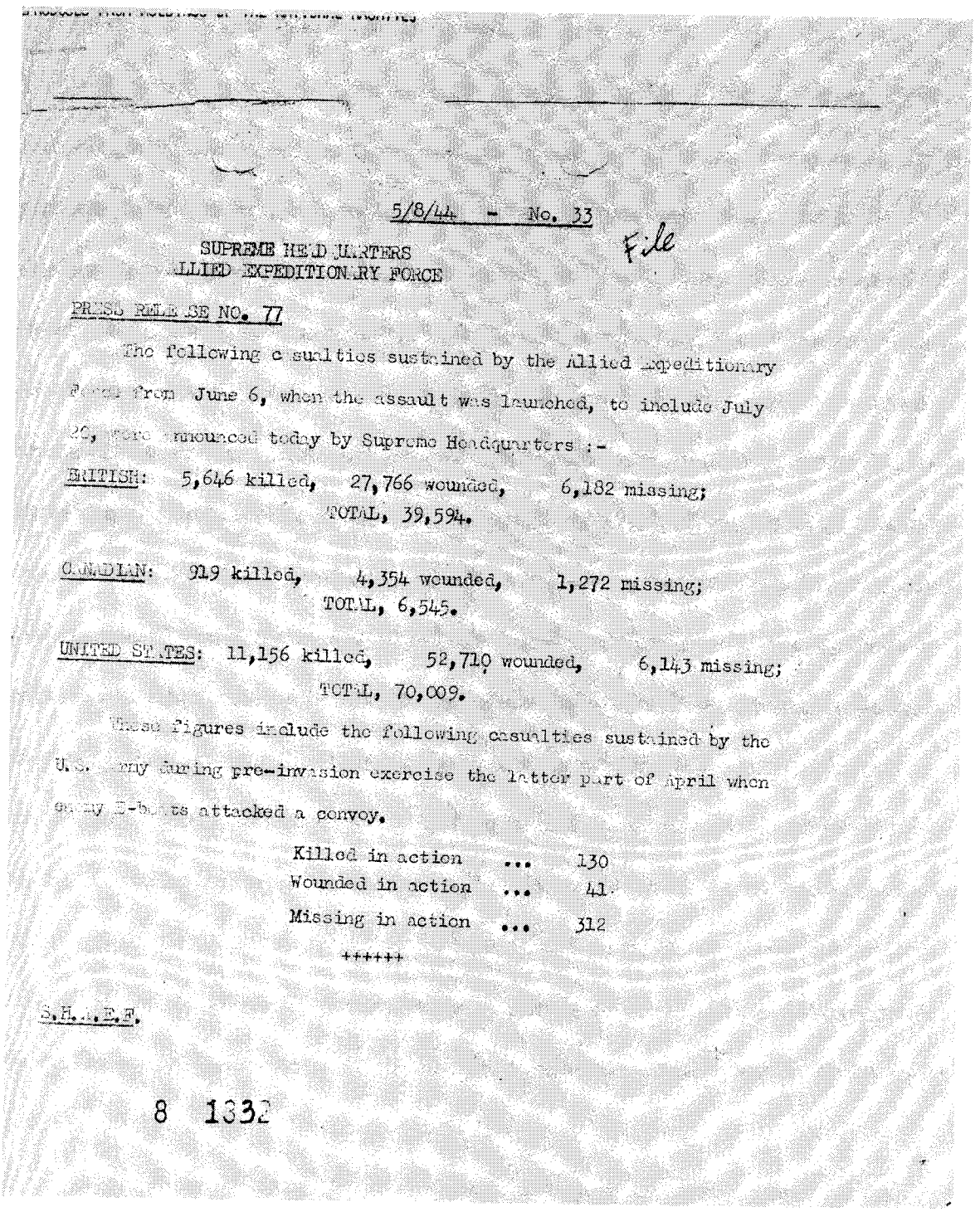
Although Skahill and Giddes escaped the disaster with their naval careers intact, these two individuals made poor decisions, which, in many ways enabled the Germans to make a successful attack. In a decentralized command and control system, initiative is the key. If individuals lack this central element, if they freeze during the climatic point of battle, then ultimately a disaster such as the Exercise Tiger debacle results. Time is critical during warfare, and individuals, regardless if it is bullets flying over their heads or torpedoes heading for their ships, must decisively perform in a small window of opportunity. Unfortunately, both Skahill and Giddes did not. Before and during the attack, these two inept individuals made abysmal choices that certainly cost the convoy dearly.

Individuals make differences in war and in the case of the Tiger tragedy, Skahill and Giddes made careless decisions. As the battle approached, time was briefly on their side, but they allowed this precious entity to evaporate into the clear night. Giddes had in his hand Plymouth's critical warning messages about the E-boats hours before the attack occurred, but did nothing. Giddes had adequate time to take action, but he let this window of opportunity fade, foolishly leading the convoy directly into the path of the marauding E-boats. Skahill should have reacted once his ship witnessed tracer fire on the horizon, but again he took no action and the convoy maintained its doomed course. Skahill should have broken radio silence once LST 507 went up in flames, and should have given direct orders to his subordinates with the convoy under attack, but he lacked initiative. Again, none of these problems would have existed if one simple action had taken place: Giddes and Skahill had taken the time to meet prior to the convoy's departure. Either because of lack of time, inexperience, or downright laziness, no such meeting took place. If the communication and escort errors had been addressed and corrected prior to the operation, the disaster may well have been either prevented or its extent lessened.

Exercise Tiger demonstrated a clear command failure. Command and communication technology had improved by the Second World War. Commanders had access to voice telephones for communication, but the tempo of combat had likewise quickened, and the decision-making window, the time that individual commanders had to make effective command decisions, had shrunk. Mostly through their own fault, Skahill's and Giddes's decision-making window continued to shrink as they steamed

directly into the teeth of the E-boats. Their erroneous decisions all but assured that the German attack was successful: an embarrassment for the Allies, but fortunately not to the extent that it jeopardized Neptune.

In warfare, assumptions can not take the place of firm, command action. Regrettably, though, Skahill and Giddes assumed—a risky choice during war. Unfortunately, their individual decisions, or better yet, indecisions, led to one of the worst naval debacles in World War II. Their blunder cost the Allies two irreplaceable LSTs and nearly a most treasured gem—tactical surprise for the Normandy invasion. Although Operation Fortitude, the Allies deception scheme, had worked well in the past, had the Germans unlocked valuable information from the E-boat attack, then it may have proven difficult for the Allies to deceive the enemy that the invasion would come anywhere else but Normandy. The Germans still had six weeks to redeploy their forces to meet the Allied assault.



5/8/44 - No. 33

File

SUPREME HEADQUARTERS
ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

PRESS RELEASE NO. 77

The following casualties sustained by the Allied Expeditionary Forces from June 6, when the assault was launched, to include July 20, were announced today by Supreme Headquarters :-

BRITISH: 5,646 killed, 27,766 wounded, 6,182 missing;
TOTAL, 39,594.

CANADIAN: 919 killed, 4,354 wounded, 1,272 missing;
TOTAL, 6,545.

UNITED STATES: 11,156 killed, 52,710 wounded, 6,143 missing;
TOTAL, 70,009.

These figures include the following casualties sustained by the U.S. Army during pre-invasion exercise the latter part of April when enemy E-boats attacked a convoy.

Killed in action ... 130
Wounded in action ... 41
Missing in action ... 312

++++++

S.H.A.E.F.

8 1332

Figure #49. Normandy casualty list including Exercise Tiger's casualties
Source: Record Group 331, Records of Allied Operational and Occupation Headquarters, World War II, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force.

Bibliographical Essay

Hoyt, *The Invasion Before Normandy*; Greene and Allen, "What Happened Off Devon"; Small, *The Forgotten Dead*; and Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*; are not the only sources pertaining to the event. A chronological list of the various sources that discuss the disaster in some detail include: Harry C. Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower* (1946); Ralph Ingersoll, *Top Secret* (1946); Gordon A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack* (1951); Omar Bradley, *A Soldier's Story* (1951); Roland G. Ruppenthal *The European Theater of Operations: Logistical Support of the Armies, vol. 1* (1953); Samuel E. Morrison, *The Invasion of France and Germany, 1944-1945* (1957); Ernest M. Eller, *Victory in the West* (1962); Alfred D. Chandler Jr., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years, vol. III* (1970); Anthony C. Brown, *Bodyguard of Lies* (1975); James L. Collins, *Lightning Joe, An Autobiography* (1979); Thomas B. Buell, *Master of Sea Power: A Biography of Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King* (1980); Susan H. Godson, *Viking of Assault: Admiral John Lesslie Hall Jr., and Amphibious Warfare* (1982); David Eisenhower, *Eisenhower at War, 1943-1945* (1986); James F. Tent, *E-boat Alert* (1996); Alex Kershaw, *The Bedford Boys: One American Town's Ultimate D-Day Sacrifice* (2001); Carlo D Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life* (2002); and Christopher D. Yung, *Gators of Neptune: Naval Amphibious Planning for the Normandy Invasion* (2006).

Throughout the secondary literature on the preparations and planning for the Normandy invasion, Exercise Tiger is briefly mentioned. Most sources discuss the exercise to highlight the practice procedures for the invasion or to briefly discuss the

disaster. A major controversy concerning the incident involved the actual number of men killed. G.A. Harrison's detailed book, *Cross-Channel Attack,* published in 1951, contained a brief synopsis of the event that cost more American lives than the actual invasion at Utah Beach. Harrison claimed that an estimated 700 men lost their lives to the E-boat attacks. Within this report Harrison identified 749 dead, but, because of the distorted information, concluded that the number killed could be higher, or lower. Therefore, Harrison estimated about 700 dead.[315] The number that lost their lives on 28 April 1944 has been a controversial issue because some scholars believe that the number of dead far exceeded 749.

Harry C. Butcher's *My Three Years with Eisenhower* was a detailed memoir of his time spent as Eisenhower's aide. Once again, the Exercise Tiger episode was covered and the details of the practice operation were noted. Butcher wrote that the Americans were astutely conscious of German E-boats patrolling the English Channel and that the Germans could attack the practice exercise. Butcher, as well as the others, also worried about German aircraft flying over Slapton Sands and discovering the elaborate practice operations.[316]

The number of Americans killed remained a question in the years following the incident; the numbers 639 and 749 appeared in most sources. Nigel Lewis's *Exercise*

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[315] Gordon A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack* (Washington: Orlando Ward, 1951), 270. Harrison based his information from a man named Jones. In the footnote, Harrison explained that Clifford Jones, "historian for engineer units that were chiefly involved in the disaster, gives 749 killed, and based his calculations on after action reports of the units and detailed casualty breakdowns. Even so, he believed that his figures may have been incomplete. Harrison also received information from the *Report by Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief Expeditionary Force on Operation NEPTUNE* (London, 1944), I, 33. In footnote #4, Harrison explained that the ANCXF report stated that the navy figures were 638 killed and 89 wounded. Therefore, Harrison estimated around 700 dead.

[316] Butcher, *My Three Years*, 527-529, 533.

Tiger concluded that the number of dead was closer to the former rather than the latter. Ralph Ingersoll, a member of the Allied staff, believed that the casualties fell between 500 and 600. Samuel E. Morison's *The Invasion of France and Germany, 1944-1945*, however, argued that 639 Americans died in the E-boat attack. In Butcher's memoir, he estimated the number of dead to be between 750 and 800. Finally, British author Ken Small claimed that the casualty list exceeded well over 900.[317] Even if the number was as low as 500, more Americans died in Exercise Tiger than in the landings at Utah Beach.

[317] Ingersoll, *Top Secret*, 103; Small, *The Forgotten Dead*, 2; Lewis, *Exercise Tiger*, 223, 239; Butcher, *My Three Years*, 535. Samuel E. Morison, *The Invasion of France and Germany, 1944-1945* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1957), 66. See chapter 17 and 18 in Lewis's *Exercise Tiger* for an in-depth investigation of the number of Americans killed in the E-boat attack.

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