

CAREFUL PLANNING ENSURES SUCCESS OF GREAT ASSAULT

**Elaborate Preparation Behind Landing of
Canadians in Sicily—Navy Personnel
Well Drilled For Task**

Ottawa, July 27.—(CP)—The navy to-day told something of the careful preparation behind its share of the invasion of Sicily—the first “combined operation” in which Canadian naval personnel retained their identity as a Canadian unit, manning their own flotillas of landing craft. There was no lack of trained men in the Royal Canadian Navy. More than a year ago detachments were sent to the United Kingdom for combined operations training. Many took part in the attack on Dieppe last August and an even larger number participated in the North African landing late last year. In command of the new units as group officer was Lieut. Jack E. Koyl, of Saskatoon, a veteran of both shows. With him were other officers with similar experience—Sub-Lieut. Andrew A. Wedd, of Toronto, who won the Distinguished Service Cross at Dieppe, and Lieut. Robert Smith, of Regina.

500 Men Take Part

(Dispatches from Allied headquarters in North Africa said it was estimated 500 Canadian naval men took part in the Sicilian landings as members of the R.C.N., the Royal Navy, and combined operations units.)

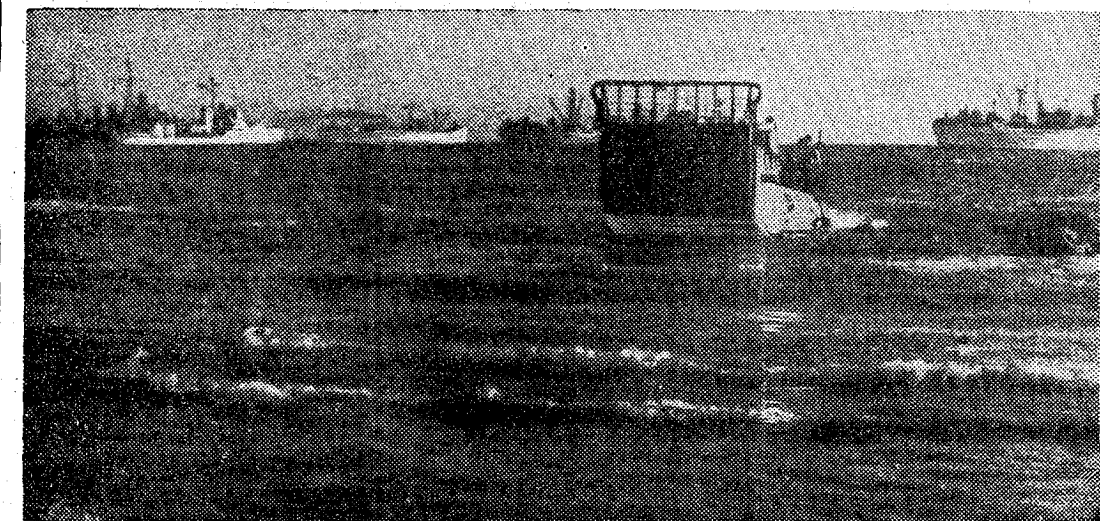
Weeks before the attack on Sicily, the new Canadian landing force got orders to sail from the United Kingdom—destination undisclosed. They were issued with tropical kit, but it wasn't considered an authentic clue since Canadian corvettes which left Canada before the North African campaign carried extra heavy clothing as though they might be headed for service in convoys to Russia.

It was a long voyage. For days

the ship sailed southward, around the Cape and up the East African coast to the Mediterranean. Training continued on the trip. There was no untoward incident. On landing craft carried by the converted liner on which they sailed appeared typical Canadian crests—the maple leaf, a moose head and other symbols.

At their destination the Canadians split up. One group stayed aboard ship but others went ashore to a camp in the desert close to the sea. Their landing craft were in constant use.

Two weeks later the senior Canadian officer was able to include in his routine progress report that “I am satisfied with the state of training of the coxswains.” Yet boatwork and more boatwork remained the order of the day as each



LANDING CRAFT PLOUGH SHOREWARDS CARRYING CANADIANS TO SICILY — While troopships and their fighting escorts lay hove-to in the background, landing craft carrying Canadian troops for their attack against the beaches of Sicily plough through the quiet sea toward shore. The invasion was started in the early dawn. —Canadian Army Photo.

man was pushed to “top-line” efficiency.

Small Arms Practice

There was practice, too, with small arms—Lewis guns, rifles and pistols. Landing craft signalmen became expert at their specialized duties; there was instruction in air-craft recognition and chemical warfare, in beach organization and seamanship.

Meantime the group which had remained aboard the liner were just as busy. By day and night the landing craft flotillas practised manoeuvres until they could change from line ahead to line abeam with precision; scatter to lessen the target in event of attack and then reform into a close-packed unit; make beach landings and withdrawals without error or delay.

Troops Come Aboard

Finally the troops who were to be landed by the Canadians came

aboard the ship. Within a few hours they had begun practising loading and unloading the landing craft. Standing by to give assistance were the well-trained Canadian seamen.

Some time before the Sicilian invasion the navy, merchant navy, army and air force put on a full-dress rehearsal for the job ahead. Lieut.-Cmdr. E. H. Bartlett, of Toronto, R.C.N. public relations officer in the Mediterranean, described it in a press release issued here to-day as “a marvellously smooth-running demonstration of well-trained men doing their jobs well.”

Quiet orders from the senior naval officer started the exercises in one ship in which a Canadian flotilla was based. The S.N.O.'s in each carrier ship are the liaison between the flotillas and the ship and between the flotillas and the other services. It is their task, when troops are being landed or re-

embarked, to see that they are mustered at the right places, and that the flotilla craft are there to serve them.

No Hitch in Plans

“Flotilla, man your craft,” said the S.N.O.

From the mess-decks where they had been drinking the inevitable cocoa, with which the navy starts night operations, the Canadians made their way to their craft. It was dark but they moved as deftly and confidently as if they had been working in daylight.

“Assault force, fall in by your craft; embark when ready,” came the order.

The troops moved to their positions. Equipment was shrugged into more secure position.

The flotilla officer, the senior Canadian officer, who would lead his landing craft afloat, checked his watch.

“If you're ready . . .” he suggested to an army officer. The word was passed down the lines and the troops commenced embarking.

Seamen stood by to help, to pass down rifles and equipment, to guide the occasional foot which failed to locate the inboard step. There was no hitch.

Slip Out in Darkness

Then it was the turn of the merchant navy. The carrier ship was manned by her own merchant crew. They were on duty at the davits, waiting the order to lower. Quick on its heels the landing craft started to descend to the sea. Greased falls, silent winches, dropped them. The splashing of keel against water was the only sound. And then, with engines turning quietly, falls were cast off and the craft, one by one, slipped away into the darkness to form into a flotilla ready to land their troops.

In the carrier ship there was no lessening of activity. More troops were to be landed and their assembly at the correct embarkation points was already in course. The return of the landing craft, once their first troops were discharged, found their second loads ready. During the whole “ferry service” there was never a delay through troops not being ready to embark or through landing craft not being in position to take them.

An army officer who, commenting on the fact the landing craft seemed to be running on unbreakable schedule, said: “these Canadian fellows know their job.” The R.C.N.'s new unit was ready for Sicily, its first big show.