SUMMARY OF EXERCISE BIGOT

The recent Operation carried out by the Airborne Division call for much consideration. The fact that technically the operation was not a success should not take away the importance and significance of the results, for there is no doubt that analysed carefully the results are extraordinary and startling.

The writer would like to state that he arrived in North Africa with very reserved opinions of the glider. He had made a careful study of gliding from the scientific point of view, and has flown behind every combination possible. These may include the following:-

(a). Hotspur and single engine aircraft.
(b). 2 Hotspurs and single engine aircraft.
(c). Horsa and Whitley, Halifax, and Albermarle.
(d). Horsa and two single engine aircraft.
(e). Hamilcar and Halifax.
(f). Dive approach by parachute attachment.
(g). Blind flying Horsa.
(h). Hotspur and Spitfire.
(i). Landed WACOs and Horsa by moonlight without flares.
(j). Wacos in starlight.

Conversations had been held with the scientists at R.A.F.Farnborough, and every conclusion had been studied carefully. It was with this information and experience that the writer commenced his investigations in Africa and this experience had made him hold an opinion of extreme reserve in the use of the glider.

Added to this, the glider pilots that he commanded had had little or no flying practise recently and he was faced with the difficult position of having no gliders and barely two months to build them and train the pilots to operational pitch. Added to all these difficulties, which incidentally were overcome by the great co-operation of the American Army Air Corps, the most difficult operation of war had to be planned for, This may be described as follows:-

The operation must be carried out by night, on to unknown country from the sea and landings were bound to meet with resistance by searchlight and A.A. fire.
One of the main points was that the tug plane had to approach in such away that they might reach base in safety, to be ready for the next operation. This point has signifance in that the approach was bound by :-

(a). A low approach to avoid R.D.F.
(b). A release point which would allow the aircraft to be out of Ack-Ack range.
(c). A minimum release height for the same reason.

The landing areas were bound by the military plan and each military formation demanded a certain number of gliders.

The actual landing grounds were called 'Able' and 'Baker' and the Glider figures were 50 & 78.

This made the plan increasingly difficult in that this military formation desired different areas to land in.

It was obvious that with such a large number of aircraft landing together a definite system had to be laid down - this prevented a long or high release where the Gliders could manouevre in the landing field - as 127 Gliders had to be landed in 30 minutes and circling Gliders might prove disastrous.

A system was worked out and tried by day - this proved a complete success in that 52 aircraft were landed on one Aerodrome in 18 minutes.

It was also tried by moonlight and proved a success in a reduced way. Thus with this organisation and plan the operation was taken on.

The writer was one of the first aircraft to take off. All seemed to go well except that the weather was extremely bad a 40 m.p.h. gale was blowing. The tow was extremely bumpy and difficult, added to the fact that the height was 300 feet.

On arrival at Malta the weather was bad in the extreme. On arrival at the target the moon was poor and gave the Tug ship an impossible job let alone the Glider pilot.

In short, for both pilots the arrival in the target area was quite unexpected and presented a position which was immediately designed to upset any plan that might have been set out. This, plus the difficulties previously experienced, and the weather ruined the technical plan. Nevertheless, 80 Gliders landed on the island and hand to hand fighting took place. It was obvious that complete disorganisation had arisen and that the surprise was complete. The morale of the enemy was shattered and this was proved by the number which surrendered. Added to this, by the individual gallantry of a few

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the actual task was carried out and the 8th Army captured Syracuse within a few hours. Thier landing was completely unopposed.

After the battle, atour was made of the Gliders and the landing area. Remarkable sights were seen. The great difficulties of the areas, the extraodinary crashes without injuries and the large numbers of Gliders which arrived against very difficult odds, were missing.

In one particular case a Glider had landed as ordered and in so doing carried out a remarkable feat of flying. The Glider released at five thousand feet, glided six miles through searchlights and flak and landed in a field 500 yards by 500 yards, with a load of 30 men. This also proves that it can be done.

The numbers of gliders put ashore and the number of men who swam ashore put the enemy in confusion. Gliders were landed by a hazy moon on impossible country. Only two cases of actual death by crashes were accounted for. A great deal of fighting equipment must have been flown in, as the battle showed.

The reason for confusion was, that bands of men up to 18 in strenght moved in the area and captured pill boxes, gun positions, bridges and prisoners.

SUMMARY

Training

Tug Pilots and Glider Pilots must have constant practice. This need not be daily but long gaps between flying mus not be allowed. Tug Pilots must be trained in night flying and Glider Pilots kept in practice on moonlight landings.

If large formations are to be used, practice.rehearsals must be held and, if possible, a rehearsal of the operation be given to all concerned.

Planning

The planning of the operation should be carried out by experts and expert opinions should be obtained, such as night flying, meteorogy, Glider landings, use of flares and navigation.

Breifing

It is essential that the Tug and Glider Pilots be crewed up and in complete understanding at the briefing. Everything that can possibly be done in the production of photographs, models, and general information should be produced.

Tugs

It is not right that a tug ship with no armour should be used against fire. A freight machine is designed for carrying freight and not as a striking force. The morale of the pilot cannot be at the highest if he knows that one tracer striking the wing will set his machine on fire. The tug pilot cannot have full confidence nor can the glider pilot. In other words the tug must be armoured in the wings and cockpit and the pilot one who has been trained to fly through flak.

It is a great credit to the Tug Pilots that they flew C-47's into hostile country knowing that they were completely vulnerable.

Gliders

The HORSA and WACO Gliders have proved themselves efficient aircraft in that they successfully landed in Sicily. However, both have faults. The HORSA needs very large tug to tow it and has an extremely poor exit. Release, it is an excellent machine and can be landed anywhere, in any light, quite safely.

The WACO is easy to handle but its carrying capacity is too small. Tactically it is not as good as the HORSA in that it cannot carry a gun and jeep. Its glide is long and flat, which makes it complicated at night. With flaps it would improve 100%. Aerodynamically it is excellent, the extraordinary landings made in Sicily being the proof.

The WACO had done sterling work and without its tough qualities the pilots could not have been trained, and a great many lives would have been lost on the operation if it had not stood up to the ditches, walls and sea landings, which it had to coop with.

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Container.

A great many weapons and large quantities of ammunition were damaged or lost through impact on walls and ditches. This could be avoided if weapons were strapped in shock proof containers.

Jeeps and Guns.

The carrying of these is not practicable unless the landing area is guaranteed flat and reasonably level. In many cases the Jeeps and guns burst through the fuselage and became lodged. This was partly due to the rough landing areas.

Final Summary by O.C. Glider Pilot Regiment.

The Glider has undoubtedly proved itself. It was tested to the limit against every obstacle, lack of interest, poor training facilities, bad weather and a formidable operation. The Glider Pilot. whether American or British, is properly trained and can pull off any type of landing by day or night. Large bodies can be put down quickly and carried great distances.

All that is needed is as follows:-

(a) Interest by higher authority.
(b) Opportunity to train.
(c) Armored tugs.
(d) Given a reasonable landing plan and a reasonable area, landings can be made, with or without lights.
(e) Expert advice and help in all respects, especially path finding.
(f) Co-operation of all services and understanding of each others task.

The chief point to be recognised is that the Allies are a point ahead in design and experience and with backing have a formidable weapon, which used correctly can prove successful beyond words.

In hand the Allies have the following:-

(1) Proved Gliders
(2) Exceptional Pilots who can both fly and fight and who have proved their worth.
(3) Proved Air Landing Troops of an exceptional nature.
(4) A war experience staff.
(5) A proved organisation.

WANTED - APPRECIATION

B.N.A.F.
20 July, 1943

Signed: J. Chatterton.
Lieut-Col.,
Commanding 1st Bn. The Glider Pilot Regiment.

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