

RESTRICTED

AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH

Translation VII/156

WAR DIARY  
of  
NAVAL OFFICER-IN-CHARGE,  
SEA TRANSPORT, MESSINA STRAIT  
(Captain von Liebenstein)  
with Summary and Conclusions.

1 August 1943 - 17 August 1943

Admiralty Ref: PG 45898 and PG 45899

TRANSLATED BY:  
AIR MINISTRY, A.H.B.6.

AUGUST 1956.

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1 August 1943

Operations

2nd Landing Craft Flotilla and 4th Landing Craft Flotilla

F 610, F 615 arrived Gallico from Milazzo forenoon.  
F.588, F 608, F 450, F522 returned to Gallico in evening  
after discharging at Messina.

Ferry Service, Messina Strait

3 ferry barges on route I North.

10th Landing Craft Flotilla

8 Siebel Ferries in ferry service, Messina Strait.  
Anti-Aircraft Siebel Ferry SF 169 arrived Catona forenoon  
from Milazzo after escorting F 610, F 615.  
SF 94 shot down one aircraft making low-level attack  
during crossing.

Engineer Landing Battalion 771

9 landing craft in ferry service Messina Strait.

Ferry Performance, Messina Strait

To Sicily: 242 men  
103 vehicles  
198 tons ammunition  
51 tons fuel  
70 tons food and equipment

From Sicily: 975 men  
600 wounded  
263 vehicles  
11 tons ammunition  
5 tons fuel  
390 tons equipment

Total transport performance to Sicily: 319 tons.

During the day, three low-level attacks were made against ferry points and craft in the Messina Strait. No damage. During the forenoon a meeting was held at Sicily H.Q. and questions concerning the withdrawal of troops from Sicily discussed. On the way back an unsuccessful low-level attack was made against the Siebel ferry in which I was sailing. Unfortunately, eight of the barrage balloons in use have been lost as a result of squalls. Others have been lost through becoming entangled when boats have approached too near each other. Consequently only two more landing craft can be equipped with balloons.

2 August 1943

Operations

2nd and 4th Landing Craft Flotillas

F 607, F 609, F 617, F 589 are discharging supplies for the Army at Messina. Under an XIV Panzerkorps regulation, only the jetties in or north of Messina may be used for discharging cargo. This amounts to only Faro Centre and

/Salvatore

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(cont'd.)

Salvatore, as the others are used by ferry traffic. To enable four barges to discharge, the whole unloading process will have to be speeded up, so that two can discharge in the forenoon and two in the afternoon. The main difficulty is getting the material away, there being a shortage of lorries.

By request of the Supply Staff, F 430, carrying a cargo of fuel, is to discharge at Paola. She has sailed for there.

Ferry service, Messina Strait:

4 ferry barges between Faro North and Cannitello South.

10th Landing Craft Flotilla

Ferry service, Messina Strait:

3 Siebel ferries between Ganzirri and Pezzo; 5 Siebel ferries between Paradiso and Catona North.

Engineer Landing Battalion 771

Ferry Service, Messina Strait:

9 landing craft between Faro South and Cannitello South.  
2 Engineer Siebel ferries between Ganzirri and Pezzo, but these are used only in emergency, as they are very slow and difficult to manoeuvre.

Sea Transport Office, Reggio

Lt. Reichardt, sailing the two oil lighters "Drossel" and "Zeisig" from Bagnara to Bari, made a short unannounced call at Gallico, and then, without informing me, put to sea again with the two lighters during the night, southbound. As a result, the preliminary measures ordered by German Naval Command, Italy, for this operation, that is, shore batteries to be warned, have not been taken. He had definitely been told to pick up orders before sailing.

Ferry Performance, Messina Strait

To Sicily: 153 men  
59 vehicles  
80 tons ammunition  
53 tons fuel  
75 tons food

From Sicily: 932 men  
377 vehicles

Total transport performance to Sicily: 178 tons.

During the day, several low-level attacks on the Messina Strait. Withdrawal of the supply depots has made it necessary for roads to be laid to the shore at Gioia Tauro. 200 men of Construction Battalion 430, which has been withdrawn from Palermo, have been moved to Gioia Tauro to set up the depots, lay roads and construct ferry points.

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3 August 1943

Operations

2nd and 4th Landing Craft Flotillas

Ferry service, Messina Strait: 4 ferry barges between Cannitello North and Faro North.

- 0600 F 430 sailed from Scilla for Paola to discharge cargo.
- 1500 F 350, F 611 arrived at Catona from Naples, carrying fuel.
- 0700 F 522, F 617 sailed from Gallico for Naples.  
F 522 is to take on radar equipment at Vibo Valentia,  
F 617 will accompany F 350 to Paola to discharge evacuation cargo from the Messina Equipment Administration Office (Intendantur).
- 1500 F 450, F 523, F 609 sailed from Gallico for Naples.  
F 450 carrying about 50 empty gas cylinders from the 2nd Naval Balloon Barrage Section, F 609 with 129 wounded.  
F 588, F 589 are being sent to Pellaro to take in tow the oil lighters "Drossel" and "Zeisig", which have run aground there. The two lighters ran aground off Pellaro when they sighted enemy MTBs at three miles' range in the morning half-light.

F 615 is towing "sea serpent" sections belonging to Engineer Landing Battalion 771 from Vibo Valentia to the Messina Strait.

10th Landing Flotilla

Ferry service, Messina Strait:

- 3 Siebel ferries between Pezzo and Ganzirri,  
5 Siebel ferries between Catona North and Paradiso.

Engineer Landing Battalion 771

- 10 Landing craft between Cannitello and Faro,  
2 Engineer Siebel ferries between Pezzo and Ganzirri.

Ferry Performance, Messina Strait

To Sicily: 260 men  
94 vehicles  
220 tons ammunition  
4 tons fuel  
28 tons food

From Sicily: 888 men  
684 vehicles  
10 tons ammunition  
44 tons fuel  
663 tons equipment

Total transport performance, Messina Strait, to Sicily: 283 tons.

During the day, several low-level attacks were again made against ferry points and ferry vessels. One U.S. fighter-bomber was shot down. During an air raid on Bagnara a fuel train was hit.

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2215 F 430 was severely damaged at the stern during an air raid on Paola. It will still be possible to discharge the cargo. The jetty at Pezzo North is being enlarged to take ferry barges, and the jetties at Catona South and Gallico South widened so that vehicles can move on and off without difficulty.

4 August 1943

Operations

Ferry service, Messina Strait:

4 ferry barges between Cannitello North and Faro North.  
10 landing craft between Cannitello South and Faro South.  
3 Siebel ferries, 2 Engineer Siebel ferries between Pezzo and Ganzirri.

5 Siebel ferries between Catona North and Paradiso.

The box-girder jetty at Cannitello Centre, which is being built by the Engineer Construction Company, Italy, is now at the stage where filling can begin. As the completion of this jetty is a matter of great urgency in the present situation, a working party of 100 men with 10 lorries has been put on the job at the expense of other work on hand, so that the jetty can be finished in 2 - 3 days. At the same time the jetty at Pezzo North is being enlarged.

0500

2nd and 4th Landing Flotillas

F 350 sailed for Paola, where she will discharge her fuel cargo. F 607 has been sent as escort.

F 440 and F 454 were due to discharge their cargoes of food at Messina during the forenoon, but orders received from XIV Panzerkorps by radio during the night stated that henceforth no food was to be unloaded at Messina. The two vessels have therefore been sent to Gioia Tauro to discharge their cargo.

F.617 arrived at Catona from Vibo with the four units of the "B" pontoon bridge ("sea serpent").

F 588 and F 589 will make another attempt to refloat "Drossel" and "Zeisig". At the moment only "Zeisig" is clear.

Ferry Performance

To Sicily: 80 men  
28 vehicles  
17 tons ammunition  
3 tons fuel  
10 tons food

From Sicily: 1601 men  
700 wounded  
559 vehicles  
46 tons ammunition  
11 tons fuel  
962 tons equipment

Total ferry performance to Sicily: 188 tons  
Total ferry performance from Sicily: 1019 tons

During the day continual low-level attacks on the Messina Strait, but ferry traffic was not interrupted. A fuel truck was hit during a raid on Gioia Tauro.

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4 August 1943  
(cont'd.)

The Director of Sea Transport, Italy has radioed the following enquiries connected with the expansion of ferry traffic for the special commitment ahead of us.

- 1) How effective are the barrage balloons, and is it desired to continue with them? Allocation of 24 spare balloons with supply and maintenance will be announced.
- 2) Supplies of urgently needed 20 m.m. quadruple A.A. are under way. Also ten 20 m.m. A.A. machine guns for I-boats. Report whether further gun crews needed.
- 3) Is assistance still needed for the emergency lighting of jetties at night?
- 4) Is assignment of personnel sufficient in view of casualties or are more crews required?

My answer to (1) is that more barrage balloons will be much appreciated, then all craft can be equipped with them, or at least all ferry barges. The balloons have already been very useful against low-level attacks in the Messina Strait, despite the disadvantage that they make the vessels more conspicuous.

Re (2), I have asked whether quadruple A.A. might be considered for ferry barges as well. I ask because of the excellent results which the Siebel ferries equipped with these guns have had in bringing down aircraft.

Re (3): As the jetties are lit at night only by oil lamps with makeshift screening, a method that is not very effective, further assistance in this respect would be appreciated.

Re (4): A reserve crew for ferry barges and Siebel ferries is requested.

The diesel oil situation for ferry barges and Siebel ferries is still very serious. I am informing the Director of Sea Transport, Italy that there are still about 50 cubic metres of B 4 in store for the 10th Landing Flotilla in Reggio. This represents 3 - 4 days' consumption. 120 cubic metres of B 4 are supposed to be coming up in four truckloads in the next few days. But in view of sharp fighter-bomber raids on railway stations we must expect losses. I have therefore urged that the flow of supplies be speeded up and facilities be given for storage. Diesel oil, too, of which only 50 cubic metres are available, and which ferry barges and landing craft consume at a rate of 12 - 15 cubic metres a day, is urgently needed. I have requested that two oil lighters now in Naples should be sent at once to the Messina Strait with Diesel oil and B 4. As it is probable that ferry vessels will shortly have to carry large numbers of troops, it will be necessary to equip landing craft, Siebel ferries and ferry barges with sufficient lifebelts and floats. 3000 lifeboats and 20 floats are being distributed to Engineer Landing Battalion 771, the 2nd, 4th and 10th Landing Flotillas. A further 1500 lifebelts and 20 floats are required, however, and these have been ordered by radio from the Director of Sea Transport, Italy. Their despatch was confirmed the same day.

/Director

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4 August 1943  
(Cont'd.)

Director of Sea Transport, Italy has ordered that, if necessary, the two lighters "Drossel" and "Zeisig" should sail without cargo and ballast. Both lighters have now been refloated and have returned to Gallico. Lt. Reichardt has been instructed and has timed the operation for 1400 on 5 August.

At a meeting with the Operations Officer, Lt.Col. Birk, at Headquarters, approval was given to a request from XIV Panzerkorps that jetties 1 - 4 should be divided among individual divisions in Sicily. Attention was drawn to the unequal capacity of individual ferry points. The N.O. i/c, Sea Transport will reserve the right to switch movement between various ferry points, if the general situation makes such a measure necessary. I also broached the question whether XIV Panzerkorps still insists on having 12 ferry barges at its disposal in the Messina Strait. With supply problems becoming more complex every day due to the enemy's air superiority, the time for withdrawing troops cannot be far off, and in my opinion we should not dispense with this important reserve, even though there is little requirement for the shipment of supplies to Sicily from now on.

The Panzerkorps is of the same opinion. German Director of Sea Transport, Italy has therefore been informed by signal that 12 ferry barges must remain here for special duties: and that the order to sail empty ferry barges from Sicily to Naples for supply purposes in groups of not less than four can only be carried out in respect of barges over and above these twelve.

Supplies of ammunition to the front, in particular 20 m.m. and 37 m.m. A.A. ammunition, were classed as very urgent.

The Catania - Messina road has been temporarily out near Taormina as a result of bombardment by heavy naval units.

5 August 1943

Operations

4 ferry barges in service between Cannitello North and Faro North.

10 landing craft between Cannitello South and Faro South.

3 Siebel ferries, 2 Engineer Siebel ferries between Pezzo and Ganzirri.

5 Siebel ferries between Catona North and Paradiso.

Work is continuing on the box-girder at Cannitello Centre and on the jetty at Pezzo North.

2nd and 4th Landing Craft Flotillas

F 434 is engaged on evacuating A.A. ammunition from Ganzirri to Catona.

F 588, F 608, F 622 are taking on evacuation cargoes for Naples at Catona and Gallico.

Ferry Performance, Messina Strait

To Sicily:    116 men  
                  37 vehicles  
                  58 tons ammunition  
                  10 tons equipment

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5 August 1943  
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From Sicily: 496 men  
533 vehicles  
78 tons ammunition  
31 tons fuel  
589 tons equipment  
500 wounded

Total transport performance to Sicily: 68 tons.

Continuous low-level attacks on the Messina Strait again. Very heavy air raid on Messina, hits principally on, or in the vicinity of, the road to Milazzo.

SF 177 damaged during low-level attack, 7 injured.

Operation Reichardt with "Drossel" and "Zeisig" will begin at 1400 so that the vessels pass Cape Spartivento before dark, as it is known from experience that there is no guarantee that the vessels will not be fired at by Italian shore batteries, even if advance warning is given. During the hours of darkness the vessels will proceed to Crotona, then in the following night to Taranto, and then on to Brindisi and Bari.

As, however, the officer in command of the operation, Lt. Reichardt, has not equipped the ships with the necessary recognition signals, life-saving gear or emergency provisions, sailing has been postponed twenty-four hours.

Commander-in-Chief, South has decided that the order for all ferry barges to be sent back to Naples in groups as they become empty shall remain in force. The opportunity will be taken to ship back valuable evacuation cargo and wounded to Naples. XIV Panzerkorps has been informed. Attention has also been drawn to the fact that it will take at least five days before a group of barges is back from Naples. In order to maintain the minimum ferry performance which I guaranteed the Korps, I shall retain where possible some empty ferry barges, certainly not less than six, and use them for ferry purposes in the Messina Strait when an emergency occurs (in that way there will be no unnecessary consumption of fuel).

6 August 1943

Operations

4 ferry barges in service between Cannitello North and Faro North.  
11 landing craft between Cannitello South and Faro South.  
3 Siebel ferries between Pezzo and Ganzirri.  
4 Siebel ferries between Catona North and Paradiso.  
The jetty at Cannitello Centre, a box-girder jetty for Siebel ferries, will be completed today. Work is continuing on the jetty at Pezzo North.

2nd and 4th Landing Craft Flotillas

1500

F 451 and F 611 with wounded, SF 608 with food and medical supplies, F 615 with radar equipment, F 588 and F 622 with Luftwaffe equipment, F 150 with flotilla equipment, all sailed for Naples via Vibo Valentia.

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6 August 1943  
(cont'd.)  
1400

Sea Transport Office, Reggio

Tankers "Drossel" and "Zeisig" sailed from Gallico. About 1700 both vessels were sunk by low-level air attack off Cape dell'Armi. The crews, who jumped overboard at the first attack, have been rescued.

Ferry Performance, Messina Strait

To Sicily: 157 men  
77 vehicles  
6 guns  
228 tons ammunition  
2 tons fuel  
14 tons equipment

From Sicily: 860 men  
500 wounded  
442 vehicles  
59 tons ammunition  
16 tons fuel  
304 tons equipment

Total transport performance to Sicily: 241 tons.

Ferry vessels and jetties were attacked by low-flying aircraft throughout the day.

Just before midday another heavy air raid on the Messina Strait, hits once again principally on, and in the vicinity of, the road to Milazzo. Enemy air attacks are now being concentrated towards the north, and repeated attacks are being made on the jetties at Faro and Cannitello and the berths at Gioia Tauro and Bagnara.

For the purpose of ferrying across the units in Sicily, the ferry routes have been numbered I to IV. Route I is Cannitello - Faro, route II Pezzo - Ganzirri, route III Catona North - Paradiso and route IV Gallico - Salvatore.

1st Paratroop Division, which is entrusted with the defence of South Calabria, has been requested to provide A.A. protection for the ferry points at Bagnara and Gioia Tauro.

7 August 1943

Operations

Ferry service, Messina Strait:

4 ferry barges between Cannitello North and Faro North,  
2 Siebel ferries between Pezzo and Ganzirri,  
5 Siebel ferries between Catona North and Paradiso,  
10 landing craft between Cannitello South and Faro South.  
In the early morning 3 ferry barges were engaged on ferrying tanks across between Pistunina and Gallico.

0900

F 412, F 437, F 398, F 434, F 618 sailed from Gallico for Naples via Gioia Tauro and Vibo Valentia.  
F 412 has evacuation cargo for the Army Supply Staff,  
F 437 has evacuation cargo for the Luftwaffe,  
F 398 has evacuation cargo for Special Task Unit ferry.

/F 434

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F 434 and F 618 with wounded. The group going back is taking 472 wounded. This has considerably relieved the central dressing station at Seminari.  
F 350 and F 454 entered Gallico after discharging cargo.  
F 440 discharged cargo at Gioia Tauro, 1 dead and 1 wounded in low-level attack.

10th Landing Craft Flotilla

SF 86 hit during low-level attack, burnt out, beached.  
I 60, I 61, I 62, I 98 arrived at Catona from Naples with 14 tons of 37 mm A.A. ammunition.

Unfortunately there is still a shortage of 20 mm A.A. am ammunition, while sufficient 37 mm is available. The expenditure of 20 mm ammunition is heavy because of the continual air attacks.

Engineer Landing Battalion 771

Landing craft No.4 has been sunk by low-level attack on the ferry route Cannitello - Faro.

Ferry Performance, Messina Strait

To Sicily: 61 men  
40 vehicles  
70 tons ammunition  
6 tons equipment

From Sicily: 829 men  
468 vehicles  
27 tons ammunition  
29 tons fuel  
705 tons equipment

Total transport performance to Sicily: 76 tons

During the day continuous heavy air attacks on ferry traffic and on Gioia Tauro. Light A.A. fire is becoming visibly less with the shortage of ammunition. During the evening heavy air attacks on the southern approach road to Messina. While inspecting the ferry points in an Engineer assault craft together with the Fortress Commandant, Messina Strait (Colonel Baade), I was machine-gunned by fighter-bombers. No damage was done. The approach roads to the ferry points at Gallico and Catona are being widened, and the approach road to Pezzo North finished.

8 August 1943

Operations

4 ferry barges between Cannitello North and Faro North.  
6 landing craft between Cannitello South and Faro South.  
At the request of Colonel Baade the remaining landing craft have been withdrawn from service to form a reserve, in view of increasing enemy air attacks.  
3 Engineer Siebel ferries between Pezzo and Gansirri.  
5 Siebel ferries between Catona North and Paradiso.  
In the early morning three more ferry barges were engaged on ferrying across tanks between Pistunina and Gallico.  
The road to the Pezzo North ferry point is finished, and also the approach road to Catona South.

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2nd and 4th Landing Craft Flotillas

F 350 ferrying ammunition for the Luftwaffe from Gallico to Messina.  
F 429 sailed Nicotera 6 August, sunk by air attack.  
F 585, F 611, F 615, F 622 sailed Vibo Valentia for Naples.  
F 435 has run aground on a reef at Vibo Valentia. Attempts at refloating without success. Salvage party is proceeding to Vibo Valentia.  
F 440 destroyed by fighter-bomber attack on the beach at Palmi. A salvage party has been sent there also, to recover valuable equipment and material.

Sea Transport Office, Reggio

Oil lighter "Nicolaus" has been sunk by fighter-bombers of Palmi. This fishing boat had been sent out alone, as it was very slow and it was hoped that the enemy would leave it alone as a harmless fishing boat.

Oil lighters "Gertrud" and "Frieda" are in Vibo Valentia with a cargo of Italian fuel.

Ferry Performance, Messina Strait

To Sicily: 76 men  
51 vehicles  
1666 tons ammunition  
25 tons equipment

From Sicily: 611 men  
339 vehicles  
91 tons ammunition  
38 tons fuel  
417 tons equipment

Total transport performance to Sicily: 191 tons.

A system of lights at ferry points has been devised for night ferry traffic. Jetties for Siebel ferries will be marked with two white lights at the end of the jetty. Just before 2100, heavy air raid on San Giovanni and Faro. Damage slight.

Upon receipt of the order "Prepare for LEHRGANG", a radio message was sent to Director of Sea Transport, Italy requesting that all available empty ferry barges be sent back to the Messina Strait, the barges to carry A.A. ammunition and lifebelts. Special value was attached to empty ferry barges, as barges could not discharge their cargoes in the Messina Strait after the evacuation of all depots. At Gioia Tauro there are only small unloading parties. That is unfortunate because the necessity for A.A. protection has forced a group of barges to discharge there. German Naval Command, Italy has ordered that these barges shall proceed into the Messina Strait by night, escorted by motor minesweepers. They will not be able to sail until the entire group has been unloaded, which may mean a considerable delay in view of the continuous fighter-bomber attacks. Such a waste would be insupportable. German Director of Sea Transport has been informed of this matter.

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9 August 1943

Operations

- 4 ferry barges between Cannitello North and Faro North,
- 2 Siebel ferried between Pezzo and Ganzirri,
- 5 Siebel ferries between Catona North and Paradiso,
- 6 landing craft between Cannitello South and Faro South.

2nd and 4th Landing Craft Flotillas

F 350 sailed Gallico for Ganzirri to carry ammunition for the Luftwaffe.

F 482, F 432 arrived Vibo Valentia.

F 618, F 434, F 412, F 391 attacked by 60 aircraft during afternoon north of Pizzo. F 434 sunk, other boats beached, probably total loss. Casualties slight, most of wounded fled ashore and are continuing northwards by devious means.

4 ferry barges in service on route IV and secondary landing points.

10th Landing Craft Flotilla

1400

3 I-boats ferrying ammunition from Messina to Catona.  
2 A.A. Siebel ferries, SF 224 and SF 230, sailed for Vibo Valentia to escort the oil lighters "Gertrud" and "Frieda" to the Messina Strait.

Engineer Landing Battalion 771

1 landing craft sent to Gioia Tauro to transfer wounded to the hospital ship "Toscana".

Sea Transport Office, Reggio

Oil lighters "Gertrud" and "Frieda" are lying at Vibo Valentia with cargo of Italian fuel. At the request of the Army Supply Staff, one lighter is to discharge at Gioia Tauro. As "Frieda" has been damaged in a fighter-bomber attack, she will be sent to Gioia Tauro.

Ferry Performance, Messina Strait

To Sicily:        139 men  
                     88 vehicles  
                     125 tons ammunition  
                     3 tons equipment

From Sicily:    1423 men  
                     338 vehicles  
                     3 tanks  
                     62 tons ammunition  
                     26 tons fuel  
                     329 tons equipment  
                     400 wounded

Total transport performance to Sicily: 128 tons.

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Hospital ship "Toscana" arrived at Gioia Tauro. Embarkation of wounded by means of a landing craft is proceeding slowly, only about 250 wounded have been ferried out to the ship. A

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second landing craft has been sent to Gioia Tauro to speed up embarkation. The oil lighter "Bussard", which sailed from Vibo Valentia without orders, has been sunk. Oil lighters have orders to wait at Vibo Valentia until sailing orders from Director of Sea Transport, Italy are received.

Director of Sea Transport, Italy has ordered ships to avoid sailing between the south and Vibo Valentia during daylight. Also, 2 cm A.A. ammunition was mentioned. As a result of this order, Sea Transport Office, Vibo Valentia has been instructed by telephone to postpone sailing of the convoy due to leave in the morning of 10 August until the evening of the same day. Motor minesweeper group R 38 has been ordered to take over the escort in the evening of 10 August and to proceed so that the convoy passes Bagnara by daybreak, so as to avoid the fire of shore batteries.

Oil lighter "Gertrud" is to discharge cargo at Messina. Radio message has been received from the Director of Sea Transport diverting to Scalea the oil lighters "Waltraud", "Kitty", "Etha" and "Lola", which are at present on their way south from Naples. Sea Transport Office, Vibo has been instructed to attempt to divert these lighters by means of messenger in one of the northerly intermediate ports.

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Shipping Movements

4 ferry barges between Cannitello and Faro,  
8 landing craft between Cannitello and Faro,  
3 Engineer landing craft on the route Pezzo - Cannitello Centre,  
6 Siebel ferries on the route Paradiso - Catona North.

2nd and 4th Landing Craft Flotillas

F 350 carrying A.A. ammunition between Messina and Gallico. F 435, F 482 will sail with the A.A. Siebel ferries 230 and 224 from Vibo Valentia to Gioia Tauro, where the two barges and oil lighter will discharge their cargoes, as instructed by Army Supply Staff. Because fighter-bomber activity has made the voyage southward very dangerous, the two ferry barges, which are urgently needed for ferry traffic on 11 August, are sailing with escort and will unload during the night. A working party of 50 men with Lt. Schlipphage in charge is being sent to Gioia Tauro.

Oil lighter "Gertrud" will discharge cargo at Vibo Valentia by order of Army Supply Staff, and not, as previously instructed, at Gioia Tauro.

Tanker "Frieda", which is lying damaged at Vibo Valentia, will be unloaded there.

Ferry Performance, Messina Strait

To Sicily: 139 men  
88 vehicles  
3.5 tons ammunition

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10 August 1943  
(Cont'd.)

From Sicily: 728 wounded  
505 vehicles  
62 tons ammunition  
337 tons fuel  
796 tons equipment

2 landing craft are being used at Gioia Tauro to embark 600 wounded on the hospital ship "Toscana".

During the afternoon, orders were received from XIV Panzerkorps for the operation called LEHRGANG to begin on 11 August. This operation is the gradual withdrawal of German troops from Sicily as they break away from the enemy. It will be carried out in five nights, during which time mainly other ranks will be ferried across to the mainland. As far as possible, the vessels will be brought back during the day. The estimated ferry performance is about 12,500 men per night. Despite opposition from me, the Army High Command feels that night operations are essential, for reasons of camouflage. My objections are as follows: Neither the ships' crews nor the troops are accustomed to sailing by night. The night will be very dark - it is the first quarter of the moon - and as no illumination can be used, the tempo of ferry traffic is bound to be slowed down considerably. For some days now, between 2100 and dawn the enemy has regularly carried out heavy bombing attacks against both sides of the Messina Strait and has paid particular attention to the northern jetties at Faro and Cannitello. One must therefore reckon on frequent interruptions, and not least on the loss of indispensable ferry craft. Worst of all, continual air attacks would create disorder among the troops embarked. In comparison, there are few air attacks during the day, and these can be warded off by heavy A.A. fire.

All preparations were discussed once more at a final meeting with the Commandant, Messina Strait. The preparations I had made were finally checked, and responsible officers were instructed in their sphere of activity.

It is regrettable that, as a result of a decision by C.-in-C., South the ferry barges retained by me for the imminent commitment have had to be sent back to Naples. As a result of the reserve of ferry barges being moved northward by Director of Sea Transport, Italy, at the moment only 5 ferry barges are available, instead of the 14 planned.

Loading and unloading of cargo and embarkation and disembarkation will be supervised by officers of the following units:

At Faro North, the Sea Transport Office, Messina;  
at Faro Centre and South, Engineer Landing Battalion 771.  
Overall responsibility at Faro will rest with the very reliable commanding officer of Sea Transport Office, Messina: Lt. Cdr. Neumann;  
at Ganzirri, Engineer Landing Battalion 771;  
at Paradiso, 10th Landing Craft Flotilla;  
at Salvatore, 2nd Landing Craft Flotilla.

The jetties will be marked with white lights: those taking Siebel ferries with two lights at the end of the jetty, those

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taking ferry barges and other craft with one white light, those taking landing craft with coloured lights. The jetties of routes II to IV will be marked with corresponding white flashing lights ( 2 - 4 ) at intervals.

Road commandants from the Army are responsible for road discipline and maintenance.

To maintain approach roads and the jetties themselves, especially in the event of damage from air attack, I have detailed for the daytime one mobile working party from 1/25 with equipment, and for nighttime, two. These working parties can be sent at any time on demand to scenes of damage. To meet the contingency of damage to telephone cables, radio communication has been established between the Operations Room of Naval Officer-in-Charge, Sea Transport and the Battle H.Q. of Engineer Landing Battalion 771. In this way, communication is ensured with the most important and most distant jetty.

The problem of fuel supplies has become as acute as that of A.A. ammunition, following the destruction of various fuel depots by air attack and the absence, or loss, of oil lighters and fuel trains.

The Supply Staff and the Luftwaffe have guaranteed sufficient fuel for five days and nights and the loading of all stocks, while units have undertaken to disperse supplies and store them as safely as possible against air attack.

11 August 1943

Ferry Movements, Messina Strait

Cannitello - Faro South:	11 landing craft
Canzirri - Cannitello Centre:	4 Engineer Siebel ferries
Catona North - Paradiso:	6 Siebel ferries
Gallico North - Salvatore:	2 ferry barges
Gallico South - Pistunina:	3 ferry barges

F 432 and F 485 are discharging the remainder of their cargo at Gioia Tauro, as there was insufficient time available in the first night to complete the job.

There is a danger that the boats and their escort will suffer fresh damage from the daily fighter-bomber attacks. On the other hand, the dangers of sailing south of Vibo during daylight are so great that the risk of the boats being further damaged in port will have to be taken, otherwise the whole convoy might be lost at sea. Cargo is being discharged during the day, in the face of continual fighter-bomber attack. F 423 has been wrecked by bombing, there are seven injured on one of the A.A. ferries. Orders from German Naval Command, Italy state that ships sailing to Messina will proceed at night, escorted by motor minesweepers. As the motor minesweepers are lying at Messina waiting to escort the steamship "Zeno" to Vibo Valentia, and the ferry barges are urgently needed in the Messina Strait for the withdrawal of our troops, motor mine-sweeper escort will have to be dispensed with. Orders have been given for the craft to sail in company with the oil lighter "Kitty", which is loaded with A.A. ammunition, at such time as to allow them to pass Scilla by daybreak.

Engineer landing craft No.4 has been destroyed by bombing, no casualties.

/Ferry

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Ferry Performance, Messina Strait

To Sicily: 264 men  
76 vehicles  
98 tons ammunition  
12 tons equipment

From Sicily: 3631 men  
801 vehicles  
35 tons ammunition  
48 tons fuel  
1128 tons equipment

Night raids between 2100 and 0500 were repeated on a very heavy scale, especially against Faro and Ganzirri.

At 1800 today Operation LEHRGANG, the steady withdrawal of troops from Sicily, began. Preparations were made for night ferrying, but in the north they were handicapped by very heavy air attack. Ferry traffic on routes III and IV was on a small scale as the Army vehicles arrived only sporadically, and their drivers spent most of the time in the air raid shelters. The comparatively high ferry performance must be attributed to the following points:

- 1) As there is no more traffic to Sicily, no time is spent loading on the mainland.
- 2) About 5% ~ 10% of the motor vehicle figures refer to motor cycles and motor cycle combinations.
- 3) The newly completed and very efficient Siebel ferry points at Ganzirri ~ Pezzo and Faro Centre ~ Cannitello Centre are producing good results.

Radio message from German Director of Sea Transport received:

"For your special operation today 12 ferry barges outside Messina Strait plus 8 as reserve proceeding from north. Calculate that with 4 jetties apart from I-boats and W-boats total of 16 Siebel ferries and ferry barges continuously required. Anchor surplus in bay close inshore, if possible near A.A. Battery. This reserve near enough to be there within 12 hours. Ready for operations. Assume ferry traffic by night, or independently by day. C.-in-C., South has guaranteed immediate assignment of 10 lorries for fuelling naval craft, as fuelling by lighter not reliable enough.

Diesel lighter lying Vibo Valentia afternoon 11 August."

Number of ferry barges in ferry service:

Route I	3 ~ 4
Route II	3 ~ 4
Route III	4 ~ 5
Route IV	4 ~ 5

That is, 14 ~ 18 ferry barges. As the largest possible number of vehicles is to be ferried across ~ there are thousands of them ~ full use can be made of these ferry barges,

/as

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as well as the Siebel ferries and landing craft. Essential factor is that the ferry barges should arrive here empty, as for reasons stated above the discharge of cargo takes so long that loaded barges would not be at the centre of operations in time. As a request with a short explanation on the subject of empty ferry barges was sent to German Director of Sea Transport two days ago, further mention does not seem necessary.

Following the departure to Führer H.Q. of the Senior Officer, Patrol Services, Messina Strait, Captain von Kamptz, I have assumed command of the ships of the 12th Motor Minesweeper Flotilla. A signal has been received announcing his successor, Captain Dr. Diederich. By far the majority of commitments in the Messina Strait are the responsibility anyway of the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Sea Transport, Messina Strait, with whom the responsible Army authorities - XXV Panzerkorps, 1st Paratroop Division, Colonel Baade's Staff - have always dealt directly. The intervention of a higher naval authority, a position which will be occupied by an officer completely new to local conditions and without special knowledge of the responsibilities involved, just at the moment when the final 5-day operation is beginning, can only create practical difficulties.

Quartermaster General, C.-in-C., South has reported that 150 drums of smoke screen chemical and ancillary equipment has been loaded on to F 451. I made a signal to German Director of Sea Transport, Italy: "No use in Messina Strait for smoke screen apparatus on F 451. If apparatus not needed in north please recall barge to Naples and unload there". Received following reply: "Unload F 451 there, so that barge available other purposes early as possible." I signal back: "No opportunity for unloading here, without two days' delay and corresponding danger of air raid damage." The barge would have to be unloaded at Vibo Valentia, where there is no unloading party, and no transport facilities for getting one there at short notice. Waiting there for other barges to form a convoy would be just as dangerous as proceeding independently, which is forbidden.

12 August 1943

Ferry Service, Messina Strait

Route I North	1 ferry barge
Route I South	13 landing craft plus 1 landing craft for wounded
Route II	
Ganzirri - Cannitello	
Centre	4 Engineer Siebel ferries
Ganzirri - Pezzo	2 Siebel ferries and 1 ferry barge
Route III	5 Siebel ferries
Route IV	4 ferry barges

0800

F 482 and oil lighter "Kitty" arrived Catona from Gioia Tauro escorted by A.A. ferries 224 and 230.

Ferry Performance, Messina Strait

To Sicily: nil

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From Sicily: 3249 men  
950 vehicles  
103 tons ammunition  
101 tons fuel  
1370 tons equipment

2nd, 4th and 19th Landing Craft Flotillas and Engineer Landing Battalion 771 are provided with sufficient fuel to maintain ferry traffic in the Messina Strait for 5 days and 5 nights. They also have full stocks to meet further requirements. Supplies of A.A. ammunition are still extremely small. Of the quota of 20 mm A.A. ammunition required, the 2nd Landing Craft Flotilla has only 45%, the 4th Landing Craft Flotilla only 15%, the 10th Landing Craft Flotilla only 18% and Engineer Landing Battalion 771 only 60%.

From 2100 to 0500 very heavy air attacks were again carried out on the Messina Strait, in particular on Faro, San Giovanni and Ganzirri. Ferry traffic on the northern routes I and II was suspended after 2100.

Shortly after 2100, I 60 was destroyed by a direct hit.

Oil lighter "Kitty" is discharging her cargo at Gallico. It has been discovered that the cargo of 20 mm A.A. ammunition is not the C 38 type required by my units, but C 30, which is of no use for the guns in my ships. The cargo was offered immediately to A.A. Brigade 22.

Further orders have been received from German Naval Command, Italy stating that motor minesweepers of the 6th Motor Minesweeper Flotilla are to be detailed to escort ferry barges between Vibo and Naples. Night sailing is advised in the zone of enemy air activity and no operations are permitted south of Vibo. For the moment no northbound convoys of ferry barges are envisaged, as all available vessels will be urgently needed in the Messina Strait.

2030 R 38 sailed from the Messina Strait for Vibo in company with R 185, R 187 and R 188, and arrived there at 2300. I intend to leave these ships there to provide immediate escort to the Messina Strait for any ferry barges arriving there. Senior Officer, Patrol Services, Messina Strait has resumed command of the ships of 12th Motor Minesweeper Flotilla.

I have ordered Sea Transport Office, Vibo to discharge cargo of oil lighter "Gertrud" for Army Supply Staff. As F 450 and F 411 have not yet arrived at Vibo, an enquiry has been sent to the German Chief of Staff in Naples regarding their exact time of sailing.

In view of the abandonment of Sicily and the great concentration of troops in the Gioia Tauro area, to which the depots of Army Supply Staff, Reggio have already been withdrawn, it is imperative that adequate unloading facilities should be created in the harbours in question. As far is known, however, no decision has yet been made as to whether South Calabria is to be held for some time, or whether it will be necessary shortly to direct the main flow of supplies much further northward.

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The unloading stations in question for the Gioia Tauro area are the beach at Gioia Tauro and the harbour at Vibo Valentia. It would also be possible to unload at Tropea, but experience gained at Gioia Tauro and Bagnara has shown that it is not easy with the means available to provide effective A.A. protection for an open beach such as the one at Tropea. Another disadvantage of the open beach is that vessels have virtually no protection against naval bombardment at night, for an attacking ship would always be within the blind spot of the 75 mm guns of our barges. The solid mole at Vibo Valentia would be good protection against naval bombardment but here there is a serious risk of mass bombing. Nevertheless, Vibo Valentia and the neighbouring beach seem to offer the best facilities for unloading in the Gioia Tauro area. I have made a signal to the 1st Paratroop Division: "Most important harbour for unloading supplies in future Vibo Valentia. Therefore request very strong A.A. protection. A.A. defences Gioia Tauro have proved not strong enough." I have entrusted the direction of the Sea Transport Office, Messina, Lt.Cdr. Neumann, an experienced and reliable officer, and I have also placed the Gioia Tauro area under his command. I am assigning to him the Harbour Company, Messina and the Kauers Construction Company as harbour works personnel and have made a signal to German Director of Sea Transport requesting approval for these measures.

The Sea Transport Office, Vibo Valentia has no unloading personnel at the moment, but because various ferry barges have sailed from Naples which cannot be unloaded south of Vibo Valentia, Sea Transport Office, Vibo Valentia has received the following signal: "F 411, F 451, F 462, F 522, F 588, F 609 will discharge there. If necessary, make use of Paetz small engineer unit from Engineer Landing Battalion 771 (25 men). Apply Army Supply Staff for further personnel."

The fact that, despite my request, the vessels coming from the north are not empty but are in fact carrying full cargo means, unfortunately, that it will be virtually impossible to use them for LEHRGANG in the Messina Strait. In any case the first group of barges will not arrive in the Messina Strait before the last day of LEHRGANG.

13 August 1943

Ferry Movements

Route I North	3 ferry barges
Route I Centre	4 Engineer Siebel ferries
Route I South	9 landing craft
Route II North	2 ferry barges
Route II	2 Siebel ferries
Route III	5 Siebel ferries
Route IV	2 ferry barges
	1 naval gun barge

As the heavy air attacks on the Messina Strait during the night make it doubtful whether ferrying can take place, the commencement of operations has been postponed until 0500, as the air raids usually cease just before 0500. Routes I and II have been closed between 2100 and 0500 to avoid serious losses.

Night traffic is continuing on routes III and IV. But as a result of last night's experience, traffic was on a reduced scale.

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There was a temporary pause, which made itself felt when an unexpectedly large number of vehicles began to arrive and the situation was not brought under control again until shortly before 0300.

Ferry Performance, Messina Strait

From Sicily: 6142 men  
440 wounded  
1131 vehicles  
36 guns  
7 tanks  
97 tons ammunition  
53 fuel  
1673 tons equipment

This performance is the maximum achievement so far, although during the night routes I and II were out of action and owing to a misunderstanding routes III and IV were working only part of the time. During the day, ferrying is restricted by the number of craft I have at my disposal.

Fuel stocks are adequate. The amount in hand is

2nd Landing Craft Flotilla	--	45 cbm Diesel
4th Landing Craft Flotilla	--	24 cbm Diesel
10th Landing Craft Flotilla	--	72 cbm B 4 21 cbm Otto
Engineer Landing Battalion 771	--	57 cbm Diesel 71 cbm Otto

A.A. ammunition stocks (% of authorised basic allowance):

2nd Landing Craft Flotilla	--	35%
4th Landing Craft Flotilla	--	15%
10th Landing Craft Flotilla	--	23%
Engineer Landing Battalion 771	--	75%

This means, unfortunately, extremely careful use of ammunition in combating low-level attacks.

From 2100 to 0500 there were again heavy air raids against Messina, Ganzirri and Faro.

During the day a landing craft used for transporting wounded was damaged by fighter-bomber machine-gun fire. The craft has had to be taken out of service. It was displaying a Red Cross flag. Engineer Siebel ferry No.1 shot down one aircraft.

High-level raids have seriously damaged the roads in Sicily used by our troops to withdraw.

A further signal has been made to German Director of Sea Transport, Italy containing an urgent request that empty ferry barges be sailed back and the reason why they are needed. With the present limited facilities for unloading, only empty barges would be available in time, and those only if, as is expected, the operation is prolonged.

/German

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German Director of Sea Transport has ordered: "As oil lighters are now directed mainly to Scalea, there must be separate sea transport representation for Scalea." And further: "Following the withdrawal to Vibo of Sea Transport Office, Messina the former Sea Transport Office, Catania and Catania Radio Station will move to Scalea and will report by radio their arrival there. Assume that Messina Radio Station is going to Vibo." German Naval Command, Italy has ordered craft to be dispersed, even outside the harbour moles.

This order corresponds to the basic landing orders which I have given my ships, but for safety's sake I am relaying it to Sea Transport Office, Vibo where a concentration of ferry barges is expected in the next few days.

According to radio reports from Naples, three groups of ferry barges are heading south, all loaded. The barges in question are apparently: F 450 and F 411, sailing date unknown; F 451, F 462, F 522, F 588, F 619 sailed 11 August; F 387, F 459, F 616, F 624 sailed 12 August, and F 617, F 611, F 615, F 523 also sailed 12 August. As no reports have been received from Vibo of their arrival, I have made the following signal to Vibo:

- 1) . Have ferry barges arrived there?
- 2) Report to Quartermaster Abteilung of XIV Panzerkorps regarding disposal if any have arrived. Do not unload without authority of Quartermaster Abteilung.
- 3) Report immediately any barges become empty so that preparations can be made for escort by 12th Motor Minesweeper Flotilla to the Messina Strait.

German Director of Sea Transport, Italy has sent a signal to Sea Transport Office, Vibo ordering that all the ferry barges shall be unloaded there as quickly as possible and sent empty to the Messina Strait. That is no longer possible in the case of ferry barges carrying cargo. The continual interruption of unloading by fighter-bomber raids has to be taken into account. It is regrettable that my request for empty ferry barges was not complied with. The destination of the 15 ferry barges is not given, but it can only be Vibo Valentia. A concentration of 15 ferry barges there, where circumstances make unloading so difficult, is a matter of grave concern in view of the day and night attacks on the harbour, and the high-level bombing. One has the impression that it is not fully realised in Rome how the air situation has deteriorated for us here since the enemy has captured Catania airfield, the effects of that, too, will be felt in the next few days. It is only in the Messina Strait that the enemy displays caution and avoids actual low-level attacks, as there he is brought under fire from all sides.

Following order received from German Naval Command, Italy: "Ships of 6th Motor Minesweeper Flotilla will put in to Vibo to escort groups of ferry barges. Escort of two per group to off Scalea, then return Vibo. Group of 4 ferry barges and more deep channel to Naples." That can only be carried out when the withdrawal operation across the Messina Strait is completed.

/Signal

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Signal from German Naval Command, Italy:

"1730 air/sea rescue needed 10 miles NNE Spartafera. Four airmen drifting in rubber dinghy." Engineer Landing Battalion has been ordered to organize a search with a large assault craft. The assault craft, accompanied by three small assault craft, saw red Verey lights in the area in question and a British air/sea rescue aircraft escorted by four fighters. One fighter broke away and headed off the assault boat by firing across her bows. The air crew seems therefore to have been taken prisoner by the British. A later search of the same area to see if there was another dinghy produced no result.

2nd Fliegerkorps thinks, however, that the British were rescuing their own men and has asked for a further search the following morning, as it concerns Lt. Reichart with 156 "kills". This request has been agreed to.

14 August 1943

Operations

During the night of 13th/14th:

Route III	-	4 Siebel ferries
Route IV	-	3 ferry barges

During the day:

Route I North	-	2 ferry barges
Route I Centre	-	3 engineer Siebel ferries
Route I South	-	9 landing craft
Route II North	-	1 ferry barge
Route II Centre	-	3 Siebel ferries
Route III	-	3 Siebel ferries
Route IV	-	3 ferry barges

Night traffic at jetties III and IV is proceeding rapidly and smoothly in bright moonlight. There are no air attacks and the ferry craft are able to proceed without interruption. Sufficient vehicles are also reaching Messina. Ferrying is continuing smoothly throughout the day, with hardly any interference from the usual fighter-bomber raids. Destruction of the northern road west of Messina during the afternoon checked the flow of vehicles to ferry stations I and II. Ferry operations went so well throughout the day that no hold-ups occurred and the best ferry performance to date was achieved. The number of men and the quantity of material ferried from Sicily to the mainland amounted to:

7424 men  
600 wounded  
1380 vehicles  
39 tanks  
42 guns  
214 tons ammunition  
155 tons fuel  
1728 tons equipment.

Orders from Director of Sea Transport, Italy:

1) 1st Company, Construction Battalion 432 will transfer to Scalea;

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- 2) As far as can be foreseen, after LEHRGANG 2nd and 10th Landing Craft Flotillas will be stationed in the Naples area and 4th Landing Craft Flotilla in the Sardinia area.
- 3) 2nd Landing Division will then transfer to the area between Leghorn and Spezia and 4th Landing Flotilla to the Leghorn area.

In accordance with my instructions, 2nd and 10th Landing Craft Flotillas have moved all men not required for Operation LEHRGANG and all dispensable equipment to the first transit camp at Tauria Nova.

Sea Transport Office, Vibo has signalled:

"After consultation with Quartermaster Abteilung, XIV Panzerkorps, decision taken to discharge cargo of F 451, F 462, F 522, F 588, F 609, F 617, F 523, F 611, F 615. All barges will probably discharge 15 August."

On the basis of an order from Director of Sea Transport, Italy, the Officer Commanding, 112 Construction Party has ordered Construction Battalion 430 to move from Gioia Tauro to Vibo Valentia. They will report to the Sea Transport Office there. "Engineer Construction Company, Italy is included" was the reply received from Director of Sea Transport, Italy to an enquiry regarding the future employment of this formation.

Senior Officer of 4th Landing Craft Flotilla will arrive at Vibo by car in the evening of 15 August. Duty will be the command and administration of ferry barges in the area north of the Messina Strait. Orders will be passed through Vibo.

On the subject of the A.A. ammunition crisis, Director of Sea Transport has announced from Rome that Luftflotte 2 has directed Air Force Field Equipment Group, Naples to make an allocation of a further 20,000 rounds of 20 mm A.A. 38 ammunition, and that immediate shipment has been arranged. Unfortunately, this ammunition will be too late for use in the Messina Strait.

A large assault craft continued the air/sea rescue search. This craft was reported overdue, and two small assault craft set out to search for it, without success. During the evening the crew of the large assault craft was picked up by the Italian hospital ship "Aquileia". Their vessel had been sunk by fighter-bombers.

At the request of the Hermann Goring Division F 503 sailed at 0600 on 14 August for Galati, under the command of the Flotilla medical officer, to embark 80 - 100 seriously wounded men. The A.A. cover of four 20 mm quadruple machine-guns which had been promised was not to hand, and the ferry barge had to defend itself with its own guns against a bombing and machine-gun attack by 8 fighter-bombers. Only 10 men with serious wounds and 21 with slight wounds were embarked, and three ambulances and two lorries with medical equipment put aboard. A request from the medical officer of the Division for a ship to be detailed to Galati to pick up other medical equipment was turned down, attention being drawn to the official ferry points.

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15 August 1943 Operations

During the night of 14/15 August, 3 Siebel ferries on Route III, 2 Siebel ferries after 0100.

On Route IV 2 ferry barges, and naval gun barge no.7 in reserve to take off any men.

On the basis of the previous night's experience, ferry traffic is being resumed on the northern routes in accordance with the orders of XIV Panzerkorps. The following ships have been detailed:

Route I North	-	1 ferry barge
Route I Centre	-	2 Engineer Siebel ferries
Route I South	-	4 landing craft
Route II North	-	1 ferry barge
Route II South	-	1 Siebel ferry

Traffic on the northern routes is scheduled to begin at 2300, if it is felt at that time that the air situation permits. Captain Paul of Engineer Landing Battalion 771 will be in control of operations.

Ferrying commenced as ordered, but the ships sailed empty, as neither men nor vehicles arrived. Operations were suspended at 0100 in consequence. Very little arrived for ferrying on the southern routes. Nevertheless, in contrast to yesterday, telephone communication was established with the Operations Officer of XIV Panzerkorps at Messina, so that systematic cooperation was possible. During the day, ferry traffic was resumed with the following vessels:

Route I North	-	2 ferry barges
Route I Centre	-	4 Engineer Siebel ferries
Route I South	-	9 landing craft
Route II North	-	2 ferry barges
Route II	-	2 Siebel ferries
Route III	-	5 Siebel ferries
Route IV	-	3 ferry barges and 1 naval gun barge.

/Oil

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(Cont'd.)

Oil lighter "Kitty" has a miscellaneous cargo of evacuation material for the Sea Transport Office, Reggio. The narrowness of the hatches restricted the type of cargo that could be loaded. As there is no chance of providing an escort, the ship will have to proceed independently, for she is exposed to danger here. She will sail at 1800. At the slow speed of 4 - 5 knots, "Kitty" will be at Vibo just before dawn.

Ferry operations proceeded without hindrance throughout the day. During the night one or two air attacks of no consequence were carried out, although flares were dropped continually over the Messina Strait.

Just before morning one landing craft suffered 1 dead and 4 wounded in a fighter-bomber attack. The landing craft brought down one aircraft and a ferry barge another.

Ferry Performance

From Sicily: 4810 men  
200 wounded  
923 vehicles  
1 tank  
16 guns  
86 tons ammunition  
9 tons fuel  
956 tons equipment

Fuel stocks are sufficient:

2nd Landing Craft Flotilla	-	30 tons
4th Landing Craft Flotilla	-	20 tons
10th Landing Craft Flotilla	-	36 tons B 4 17 tons Otto
Engineer Landing Battalion 771	-	50 tons Diesel 61 tons Otto.

The continuous heavy air attacks reported from Vibo are creating serious problems in the harbour and disorganising supplies. Only those ferry barges on absolutely essential duty may enter the harbour. The Operations Officer of XIV Panzerkorps is reckoning on three more complete days of ferrying. It is therefore conceivable that I shall be able to move some ferry barges to the Messina Strait for the last day, to replace losses. It is astonishing that the enemy has not made stronger attacks in the past days. There has frequently been a pause of 1 - 2 hours between individual fighter-bomber raids, while high-level attacks have been practically non-existent. It is only during the night that raids are frequently incessant.

Colonel Baade's Staff has relayed the XIV Panzerkorps order to evacuate the 105 mm A.A. guns of four Batterien by ferry barge. That means 16 - 20 guns, and will require, in addition to the ferry barges in the Messina Strait, 5 more at Vibo Valentia, which is to be the destination of the guns. With the 5 ferry barges being held there in reserve for the Messina Strait, that will mean a strong concentration for a harbour so exposed to air attack. The other ferry barges will, in any case, have to sail back to Naples immediately. I have therefore made a signal to

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the Senior Officer, 4th Landing Craft Flotilla at Vibo Valentia: "End of LEHRGANG probably not before 18 August. Keep 5 empty ferry barges standing by to sail to Messina Strait to replace losses here, 5 others to take 105 mm A.A. guns to Naples on conclusion of LEHRGANG. Other ferry barges not required here." A.A. Brigade 22 has enquired whether A.A. defences are still required for Gioia Tauro. As there is no further need to discharge cargo there, the answer "no" was given. The A.A. defences for Vibo requested of 1st Paratroop Division have not materialised. Perhaps they have not received my signal. The absence of an Army radio station here is having unpleasant repercussions these days. I have accordingly made a signal to the German Director of Sea Transport:

"A.A. defences for Vibo Valentia applied for by us have so far not been provided. Request you arrange for A.A. immediately, as protection urgently needed for 15 ferry barges about to discharge cargo there."

Signal received from German Naval Command, Italy:

"If short of ferry craft, recall Vibo ferry barges." At the moment, unfortunately, there are no empty ferry barges there. A recent telephone conversation with the Panzerkorps has disclosed, however, that the bulk of men and material has already been ferried across. The all-out effort and self-sacrifice of our crews, who sailed their ships day and night in the face of almost continual fighter-bomber attacks, has achieved results considerably in excess of those expected by the Army High Command. I have therefore ordered Sea Transport Office, Vibo Valentia to sail 5 empty ferry barges to Naples by night, via the deep channel, escorted by two motor mine-sweepers. The motor minesweepers will accompany the barges as far as off Scalea and then return to Vibo. Only 5 ferry barges need remain there to remove the 105 mm A.A. guns.

As a result of the overcrowding of transit hospitals in the Palmi area, hospital ships are urgently needed to transport wounded to Naples. German Naval Command, Italy has been requested to detail the Italian hospital ship "Aquila", at present lying empty at Messina, to Gioia Tauro, to embark 750 wounded there on 16 August.

16 August 1943

Operations

During the night of 15/16 August:

Route III ~ 3 Siebel ferries  
Route IV ~ 3 ferry barges

Just before 2300, in the course of an action involving ships of the 12th Motor Minesweeper Flotilla on patrol, a Siebel ferry was fired on by a shore battery at Messina, despite her making recognition signals. I immediately ordered ferry traffic to stop. As, however, nearly 200 vehicles were waiting at Messina, ferrying was resumed just before 0030. A complaint has been sent to XIV Panzerkorps.

Just before 2300, SF 175 began to sink off San Giovanni, as a result of leaks and blast damage sustained in the last bombing

/attack

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attack, during the afternoon. The ferry may yet be beached, but she has run aground about 20 metres from the shore, and so it is impossible to unload her cargo of vehicles. Those that are not already submerged by the vessel's list are being transferred to SF 92, which has gone alongside.

At 0500, day traffic was resumed on all ferry routes:

Route I North	--	2 ferry barges
I Centre	--	4 Engineer Siebel ferries
I South	--	5 - 6 landing craft
II North	--	2 Siebel ferries
II South	--	2 Siebel ferries
III	--	4 Siebel ferries
IV	--	3 ferry barges and 1 naval gun barge

2 landing craft are being sent to Gioia Tauro to move wounded. The hospital ship which was requested has not arrived there. A signal has been made to German Naval Command, Italy, urgently requesting the ship for 17 August.

The 4th Naval M/T Abteilung has not arrived. Its duties in the area of the Messina Strait will cease to exist within the next day or so. As my duties also cease on 17 August, I cannot take over command of the company. I have therefore made the following signal to German Naval Command, Italy:  
"Leaving Messina Strait with 2nd and 10th Landing Craft Flotillas probably 17 August. Who will then take over command of 4th Naval M/T Abteilung? 20 lorries are required here for 616 Naval Gunnery Abteilung. Using other vehicles at first for evacuation of naval establishments from here to the Naples area."

The transfer of Construction Battalion 432 initially to Vibo Valentia has been arranged for 16 August. Only the working parties for the ferry points, 60 men in all, will have to remain behind until the afternoon of 17 August, when ferrying has ended. Sea Transport Office, Vibo has been instructed: "Unload from F 450 as many gas cylinders of Seagoing A.A. Command South as required for balloon sites there. Send remainder back to Naples together with lifebelts, rafts, canteen goods of 10th Landing Craft Flotilla. Keep 2 cm ammunition there for ferry barges calling, if not immediately sent here by lorry." Also: "Only 2 - 3 ferry barges required for loading 105 mm A.A., but not immediately. Therefore consult Quartermaster Abteilung, XIV Panzerkorps and load ferry barges returning to Naples with the exception of 3 for task mentioned. Sail always at night, with motor minesweeper escort as far as off Scalea."

As a result of talks with A.A. Brigade 22, it is now known that there are no more than 12 guns.

Colonel Baade has agreed that the flotillas, engineers and my own staff shall withdraw on 17 August, when LEHRGANG is completed. XIV Panzerkorps has stated that it will probably be over between 0900 and 1000.

During the afternoon I received the following order from XIV Panzerkorps: "During the coming night it is vitally important that all ferries should sail continuously on all 4 routes, so

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as to evacuate the last units of XIV Panzerkorps to the mainland. It may happen that the ferries have nothing to do for hours and have to wait until a new contingent of men and vehicles arrives at the ferry points. Ferry craft will probably cease operating just before 0700 tomorrow, after which only assault craft need be used. But ferrying tomorrow morning cannot cease without the authorisation of Engineer Captain Holzapfel at ferry points I and II, and of Panzer Captain Rossmann at ferry points III and IV. These two officers are the only persons authorised to order a ferry not to return to the west side after discharging cargo. After the splendid ferry performance to date, I expect that ferry personnel will carry out their duty in the same exemplary fashion during the last vital night." (Signed) Hube: General der Panzertruppen."

Senior Officer, Patrol Services, Messina Strait has informed German Naval Command, Italy by signal that

- 1) Naval Radio Station, San Giovanni has closed down and has moved to Scalea;
- 2) He himself has withdrawn to Rome following the completion of his duties.

Sea Transport Office, Reggio is moving to Paola.

A signal has been received from German Naval Command, Italy: "N.O. i/c, Sea Transport, Messina Strait will not leave until authorised by XIV Panzerkorps via S.O., Patrol Services, Messina Strait. Four trains allotted. Naval M/T Abteilung will remain there. Hand over vehicles required for 616 Naval Artillery Abteilung to Senior Coastal Artillery Commander, Messina Strait." Apparently they think in Rome that I might leave my post without consulting the appropriate authorities! The Senior Officer, Patrol Services, Messina Strait has already gone. So far, all questions concerning ferry operations have always been handed directly between XIV Panzerkorps and myself.

In the course of the day, fighter-bomber attacks became more intense. There were also numerous high-level attacks. Just before 1600, F 607 was badly damaged by a near miss off the ships side, and 2 Siebel ferries as well. Salvatore, the northern jetty for ferry barges at Messina, was put out of action by bombing. A relief ferry point is being used. Ferry operations have been distributed accordingly. There is no Siebel ferry left with two engines in working order. As there will be extensive troop ferrying to do today, A.A. Siebel ferries and I-boats will be used.

Ferrying continued throughout the entire night of 16/17 August.

It is expected that the last troops will leave Messina tomorrow morning between 0900 and 1000. Following an order from XIV Panzerkorps, the order to cease ferrying at Messina will be given by Captain Holzapfel for routes I and II, and by Captain Rossmann for routes III and IV. I have instructed my staff officers to see that ferrying at Messina is stopped at the correct time. The bright moonlight is helping operations considerably. High-level night attacks have had no particular effect.

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The last ferries left Messina just before 0600. In the early hours of the morning British artillery fired on Messina from the south without causing any damage. I have issued the following daily order:

"The time for operations in the Messina Strait is over. Following the movement, first of material, then troops, and then material again to Sicily, in the end troops and material have had to be ferried back in the face of continuous and mounting enemy action. A loyal sense of duty has enabled the ferry performance to be raised from small beginnings to a pitch of efficiency which surpassed all expectations, and the final figures represent an achievement, of which everybody participating within the command of N.O. i/c, Sea Transport, Messina Strait may justly be proud. This achievement is due to the part played by the crews of the naval ferry barges and Siebel ferries, the crews of the craft operated by Engineer Landing Battalion 771 and its staffs, the officers and men of the Construction Battalion and the Harbour Companies, of the Engineer Construction Company, Italy, the Sea Transport Offices, and the Army and Air Force Supply Staffs. It required not only good organisation, but endurance, hard work and fighting spirit to carry out this operation of historic importance. And I have noted with pleasure that these qualities were always in evidence where they were most needed. Such cooperation made it possible to withdraw our comrades from Sicily almost to a man, and to bring back far more material than was ever expected. We mourn our comrades who have died, and our thoughts turn to the sufferings of our wounded, but we know that their sacrifice has not been in vain. To them first, and to all other comrades, I wish to express my thanks at this moment when we are obliged to leave the Messina Strait. We shall now employ our strength elsewhere, fully trusting in the final victory of our Fatherland.

(Signed) von Liebenstein.

San Giuseppe, 17 August 1943."

The "Hohlstab" gear was picked up at Scilla and was to be towed by landing craft to Vibo Valentia before being taken on to Naples. It is, however, so tightly jammed between the rocks that there is no chance of towing it away.

Very heavy, continuous fighter-bomber attacks were resumed at dawn. Roads, as well, are under continuous fighter-bomber attack.

Since midday yesterday the Messina Strait has been under slight fire from enemy artillery, apparently 150 mm. The only time left for unloading and transshipment is this forenoon, as there may be artillery bombardment from the Messina side by this afternoon. The evacuation will therefore end at an awkward time for me to withdraw my ships. They cannot get away during the day because of fighter-bombers, and will have to haul around the corner at Cannitello as best they can to gain shelter from the enemy artillery. I have ordered A.A. defences to be strengthened from there. There is not a single Siebel ferry left with two serviceable engines. The only ones that can be withdrawn are 3 A.A. Siebel ferries, for the others could only raise 4 knots on one engine, which is too slow in the circumstances.

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Until further notice, Vibo Valentia will remain the southernmost port for unloading, with Paola and Scalea the next towards the north. The duties in these harbours will be purely Sea Transport Office matters, and I shall not be required.

Signal received from German Naval Command, Italy:

"Make sure that even the non-operational craft are moved from the Messina Strait and that they are all loaded with evacuation material." As far as the ferry barges are concerned, this has been done. They have taken away damaged tanks and 105 mm A.A. guns. There are no more "non-operational" craft in the sense conveyed in the signal, i.e. damaged but still able to proceed under their own steam. In any case, there can be no question of towing the Siebel ferries which have only one serviceable engine. And these craft have all suffered bomb-splinter damage as well.

A report has been received from the ferry points stating that the last ferries have arrived. The ferry crews and the engineers of Engineer Landing Battalion 771 have done a wonderful job. For days on end they have carried out their onerous task in the face of almost incessant day and night air attack, and are now suffering from extreme exhaustion.

Ships of the 2nd, 4th and 10th Landing Craft Flotillas are assembling in the area between Cannitello and Scilla, so as to sail north at nightfall.

In the course of the day the only enemy action observed took the form of numerous fighter-bomber attacks and sporadic artillery fire. The camp at San Giuseppe was evacuated during the forenoon and the remainder of flotilla stores taken away by lorry.

At 1700 I left the Messina Strait together with my staff in two cars, a motor cycle combination and a lorry, travelling via Gambari.

(Signed) v. Liebenstein.

/CONCLUSIONS

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CONCLUSIONS

Initial Situation

At the end of the Africa campaign, the ships of the 2nd Landing Craft Flotilla and the Air Force ferry units which had been operating in that campaign were engaged in the Messina Strait, where a transport problem affecting German material, vehicles and troops had arisen as a result of the Italian ferry steamers being lost through air attack. The Engineer Landing Battalion, Africa (later renamed Engineer Landing Battalion 771) was already using landing craft as ferries there. Understandably, the independent operation of various units with no overall command did not prove successful. As the result of a report which I submitted to German Director of Sea Transport, Italy in my capacity as Senior Officer, 2nd Landing Craft Flotilla, a new command was created to deal with this traffic. The officer appointed to this command in the first instance was Lt.Col.Schiller, the Officer Commanding, Air Force Ferry Flotillas. When his vessels (Siebel ferries) were absorbed by the 10th Landing Craft Flotilla, I was to be his relief. When I took over on 25 May 1943, the situation was as follows:

a) 3 ferry routes were in operation:

- 1) Cannitello - Faro for landing craft
- 2) Catona - Salvatore for ferry barges
- 3) Gallico - Salvatore (hospital) for Siebel ferries.

b) By order of C.-in-C., South, the Chief of Army Supply Staff, Reggio (Major Schiele) had been appointed O.C., Armed Forces Supplies. Regular meetings were held between his office and that of the O.C., Air Force Ferry Flotillas, at which available shipping space for the following day was divided up among the various units concerned with supplies, according to requirement.

c) The Sea Transport Office, Reggio was concerned exclusively with the loading of ferry barges and vessels of the Mediterranean Shipping Company at the port of Reggio. The loading of ferry barges, Siebel ferries and Engineer Landing craft elsewhere in the Messina Strait and their unloading on the Sicilian side was the direct responsibility of the Service units concerned. Because of the shortage of personnel at the Army Supply Staff, Messina, a ferry barge would lie several days at Faro before being unloaded. First of all, then, my position with regard to the O.C., Armed Forces Supplies, Reggio, the Sea Transport Office, Reggio and the newly established Sea Transport Office, Messina had to be clarified. To achieve maximum efficiency, it seemed to me that I should be given some authority over the Army and Air Force units engaged in ferrying. That was rejected. However, under a directive from Vice Admiral Ruge, the Flag Officer, German Naval Command, Italy, my particular ferry operations were made exclusively a naval matter. There was, therefore, no question of coming under an Army command. It was a matter of cooperation. German Director of Sea Transport, Italy gave me authority over the Sea Transport Offices at Reggio and Messina, so that there was at least unified representation for the Navy.

Commitments and Resources

A ferry service of small craft had to be maintained across the Messina Strait, the target quota of material to be carried to Sicily being

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27,000 tons a month. Taking into account the fact that some days would be lost by bad weather, that meant a daily quota of some 1,000 tons, including quantities of material taken to Sicilian ports outside the Messina Strait. After a short while the direction of ferry operations was placed in my hands, as the situation could be seen better from the Messina Strait than from Rome. The possibility of fighting in Sicily itself was taken into account when the ferry operations were planned, and allowance had to be made for increased enemy activity by air and sea.

The naval resources available for the task were an average of 8 Siebel ferries, 2 A.A. ferries and about 10 I-boats and W-boats, all of the 10th Landing Craft Flotilla, and 20 ferry barges and 2 naval gun barges of the 2nd Landing Craft Flotilla. Of these, only the Siebel ferries and ferry barges were engaged on direct ferry operations. The latter were also used for traffic to Sicilian ports outside the Messina Strait and for fetching material from the Naples area. After fighting had begun in Sicily, extensive use was also made of the 4th Landing Craft Flotilla. I was also given operational command of the following units upon their arrival in the Messina Strait:

- 1) Engineer Landing Battalion 771 ( originally Engineer Landing Battalion, Africa) under Captain Paul consisting of one company for landing craft one for Siebel ferries, and one for "sea serpent".
- 2) The Maurus Construction Battalion and, after that was transferred, Construction Battalion 432 (Captain Schritter).
- 3) Engineer Construction Company, Italy (Lieutenant Froehlich).
- 4) Harbour Company, Messina.

And towards the end:

- 5) Construction Battalion 430 (Major Schnell).
- 6) Lieutenant Kauers' Construction Company.

I also had authority over the Sea Transport Offices at Reggio and Messina. While Engineer Landing Battalion 771 used its craft to maintain a ferry service on the northern ferry route, the function of the Construction Battalions and the Harbour Company, Messina was to provide working parties for the ferry points and to develop approach roads to the jetties. The Engineer Construction Company, Italy took over the task of constructing jetties although a start could not be made until towards the end of June because the requisite equipment, notably pile drivers, did not arrive at the right time.

Daily Conference

In order to secure cooperation, contact had first to be established with all the Service units concerned with supplies. This meant, in addition to the Sea Transport Offices and the O.C., Armed Forces Supplies, Reggio (Army Supply Staff), the out station of C.-in-C. South Transport Staff at Reggio, the main supply station of the Air Force and corresponding stations on the Sicilian side. None of these authorities had much contact with each other. Their spheres of responsibility were not clearly defined, and naturally enough individual stations were out to secure all they could for their own branch of the Service, so that there was continual friction.

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The absence of a unified command was having a disturbing effect on planning the allocation of shipping space and the question of routes to be used, especially as communications were bad at the outset.

The expedient course therefore seemed to be to extend the daily conferences and call in representatives of all units directly or indirectly concerned in ferry traffic.

At these conferences, Service requirements in respect of shipping space and targets to be achieved were ascertained, and priorities established in the event of a shortage of shipping space. After that the transport programme was drawn up. At the same time, all questions concerned with preparations and subsidiary matters were discussed and appropriate directives issued. This daily conference gradually turned the office of N.O. i/c, Sea Transport into a central authority recognised by all Service units as the responsible authority for directing the movement of German supplies at sea in the Sicily area. The conference also served a useful purpose in instructing all those present in the general situation locally.

Daily conferences were held right up to the last day of ferry operations and proved most successful.

Cooperation with the Italians

N.O. i/c, Sea Transport viewed relations with our Italian ally in the light of sober reality. With all the goodwill existing on both sides, an Italian effort or contribution to sea transport was no more expected than any other military achievement.

On the other hand, the Italians were cordially invited to make use of the German organisation. For a time, from about mid-June to mid-July, Italian representatives made fairly regular, if unpunctual, appearances at the daily conferences. Under an order from G.-in-C. South, up to 25% of Siebel ferry space was placed at their disposal. This allocation was never used to the full. Only on one or two days did Italian ferries sail with more than 20 vehicles; in general they confined their demands to the ferrying of single lorries, and in the course of the month these too ceased. On the other hand they had quite a contingent of individuals, both civilian and Service, using the Cannitello - Faro route.

Relations with Italian authorities in Calabria were good right up to the last moment. Those primarily concerned were the representative of the Comando Marina at Reggio, Captain Tesi, and his liaison officer Count Pavoncelli. Collaboration with the Comando Marina at Messina was not so good. It was just possible to get on with Admiral Barone, but there was always friction with his Chief of Staff, Captain Cei Martini, who gave the impression of being definitely anti-German.

Method of Ferrying

The quantity of supplies moved to Sicily was conditioned by the amount of shipping space available. The loading of supplies directly on to the ferry boats would certainly have meant that a much greater weight of supplies was carried, but the loading and unloading involved made only one crossing a day possible. It therefore proved more practicable to secure a direct run between the supply depot on the mainland and the supply depot in Sicily by ferrying over the lorries complete with their loads. Once the organisation was running smoothly, up to 80% of the lorries engaged on this work were able to make two crossings a day.

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Unfortunately, only about 100 lorries at the most were available for the routine movement of supplies across the Strait. With more lorries, the ferry performance could have been more than doubled straightaway.

Detailed organisation by each flotilla, with a carefully worked out sign signalling and berthing system for each ferry, gradually reduced the time spent in loading: very fine performances were achieved with a bare 20 minutes for a Siebel ferry (9 - 12 vehicles according to size) and 6 - 8 minutes for a ferry barge (5 - 6 vehicles).

Type of Ferry

The best vessels for the purpose proved to be the Siebel ferries, because they could take a large number of vehicles, especially those with trailers, for which the engineers' landing craft were less suited. The Siebel ferry, too, by going alongside a jetty, largely fulfils the requirement that as many vehicles as possible should drive straight ahead on to the ferry and straight ahead off it. A more expedient design of superstructure (moving it aft) would reduce the amount of arranging at present necessary. It is also important that the crews' quarters should be accessible when the ferry is fully loaded. It was for this reason that it was not possible to load a Siebel ferry just before dark and sail her first thing in the morning.

The ferry barge is less suited for loading with vehicles because of the wear and tear.

Ferry Points

The movement of supplies started slowly. At the outset there was only one pontoon jetty (the "sea serpent" of Engineer Landing Battalion 771) for Siebel ferries at Gallico and one at Paradiso, Messina, one jetty for landing craft at Cannitello and one at Faro, and one ferry point for ferry barges at Gatona and one at San Salvatore, Messina.

An immediate start was made with the construction of sufficient ferry points to meet the demands of heavy traffic and growing enemy air attacks. Berths also had to be found for ferry barges on long distance traffic. The principles followed in the construction of these ferry points and jetties are contained in the Appendix.

At the end the following ferry points were available in the Messina Strait for the final withdrawal:

Messina Side

Reggio Side

Route I

Faro North	Ferry Barges	Cannitello North
Faro Centre (jetty)	Siebel Ferries	Cannitello Centre (jetty)
Faro South	Landing Craft	Cannitello South

Route II

Ganzirri North	Ferry Barges and Landing Craft	Pezzo North
Ganzirri South (Sea Serpent)	Siebel Ferries	Pezzo South (jetty)

/Route III

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Messina Side

Reggio Side

Route III

Paradiso (Sea Serpent)	Siebel Ferries	Catona North (jetty)
	Ferry Barges	Catona Centre Catona South

Route IV

San Salvatore and two subsidiary landing stages	Ferry Barges Siebel Ferries	Gallico North Gallico Centre (jetty)
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Route V

Pistunina	Ferry Barges	Gallico South
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Also for berthing ferry barges:

Galati	Ferry Barges	Occhio (3 jetties)
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Ponte Schiavo

Plans were drawn up for establishing stations for ferry barges between Messina and Catania at Cape Molini, Ionia and Giardini, and north of Messina at a point 2 km west of Milazzo. After fighting had begun on the island, these stations were used as long as the military situation permitted. They were never fully developed. At Bagnara a fuel station was set up, which operated well until the railway line was destroyed. Two jetties for ferry barges, with approach roads, were also set up at Gioia Tauro.

"Sea Serpents"

The "sea serpents" of Engineer Landing Battalion 771 proved a useful jetty for Siebel ferries. They also provided an emergency reserve against the possibility of a jetty being destroyed by bombing, although in practice they were not needed. Before the first jetties were set up, Siebel ferries would have had no wall to go alongside, had it not been for this expedient. The "sea serpents" also proved indispensable where a rocky bottom prevented piles being driven.

The Engineer Landing Battalion had to rely wholly on the Navy for its stores and accessories (ropes, anchors, fuel, etc.). In my opinion this raises the question as to whether this Battalion should not be taken over by the Navy, where it would be easier to recruit reserve personnel for it. In my opinion, the Battalion can be engaged anywhere where Siebel ferries operate, and its "sea serpent" company is a necessary adjunct to these craft.

Steel Landing Strips and Derricks

It was obvious, especially at the end of the ferry period, that some more convenient way must be found of berthing ferry barges on the beach than making approach roads over the sands, which are often 50 metres or more wide. This laborious operation takes days, even weeks, to complete.

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The answer is a steel landing strip. A requisition was made for them right at the beginning, but one difficulty after another arose and they never materialised. In my opinion all ferry barges should be equipped with several (10 - 20) metres of steel landing strip so that, wherever they are, they can put their landing strips together and discharge or take on vehicles.

Derricks should also be provided to facilitate the loading and unloading of ferry barges. Industry has plenty of them and they would only need slight modification. Even with a large labour force, a barge cannot be unloaded as quickly as it can be mechanically, because not enough men can get into the small space. But apart from this, men are usually not on tap when a barge arrives unexpectedly. The whole ferry problem in the Messina Strait would probably have taken on a different look if sufficient mechanical devices had been available. Goods could have been ferried over instead of loaded lorries, thus relieving the shortage of these vehicles.

Communications

Communications were a permanent problem right up to the end. There were naval radio stations at Reggio, Messina, Palermo, Catania. They carried out their duties up to the very last minute, and at times, during the temporary breakdown of other Armed Forces radio stations, had to take over all Service radio traffic. The naval radio station at Reggio, in particular, was so rushed for a time after the Reggio teleprinter office has ceased to function that the rapid transmission of important signals was seriously jeopardised. At times the despatch of telegrams took up to 36 hours. At that time the pressure of work was so great that all signals submitted by the different units for transmission had to be closely examined to see whether it was absolutely necessary to send them as signals. As early as the end of July, the teleprinter office at Reggio was knocked out by enemy action and played no further part in communications. The nearest radio station was at Naples; that proved extremely awkward when Reggio ceased to function. A proposal made by N.O. i/c, Sea Transport to the effect that a terminal for radio stations should be set up somewhere near Vibo Valentia could not be put into effect, although the proposal was recommended by the Staff Officer, Communications with C.-in-C., South. The daily courier service to Rome operated by Garrison Commander, Reggio was of no use to use because Garrison Commander, Reggio moved to Gioia Tauro in mid-July. When Reggio radio station ceased operating we ran our own courier service to Naples. There was no direct telephone communication with Messina. The only line was by way of Catania, and was practically useless because conversation was never intelligible. Another trouble was that there were practically no facilities for telephoning the authorities in Rome. The only connection, that via Catania, was scarcely intelligible and later ceased altogether. It would be an advantage if the Navy were provided with beam transmitters such as the Air Force has.

Another serious disadvantage was the bad communications between XIV Panzerkorps and other army units, especially the 1st Paratroop Division in Calabria. Signals could only be transmitted, and then not always, over the naval radio system to Rome and relayed from there over the army radio system. But that meant intolerable delay. An effort must be made to secure good radio communications between the Armed Forces H.Q. and the Navy H.Q. in combined operations. In my opinion, such communications can only be established by fitting out the naval radio stations with army equipment and instructing them in army signals procedure. I consider that

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this question is so important that it should be made the subject of detailed investigation. A number of failures which arose would not have arisen with good communications.

A VHF link was established by means of army stations between N.O. i/c and Sea Transport Office, Messina. This link went some way towards remedying the lack of rapid communications between both sides of the Messina Strait and especially with the German Chief of Staff at Messina. In order to transmit secret information by VHF, a requisition for the Naval Signal Code was made, but it did not arrive in time. For practical reasons the use of Code M was out of the question. An emergency code was introduced and was later used for communication by army radio between N.O. i/c and Cannitello, Faro and Gioia Taure (by Engineer Landing Battalion 771). For such purposes, however, there should be a simple code available and the unit should not be left to its own devices. If there are such procedures in existence the Senior Communications Officers must know of them. Instead of being able to help, however, the Naval Communications Officers could do nothing but point out that this procedure (based on Foreign Office systems) was inadmissible. Unfortunately, the army communications mentioned were not established until the last days, so that little was felt of their beneficial effect. Telephone communications between individual units in the Messina Strait were extraordinarily bad. There were continual breakdowns, and not only because of enemy action. Nevertheless, in due course telephone communication was established with all units in the Messina Strait directly or indirectly concerned with ferry traffic. In some cases this was done by joining up with the circuit of A.A. Brigade 22, although at the price of frequent interruption when the guns were in action. On the other side, telephone communications were established in this way with Messina in the end, and in particular with the Operations Officer of XIV Panzerkorps, who was there towards the end. These communications provided an excellent service. Little use could be made of motor cyclists for communications purposes, partly because of a shortage of serviceable cycles and partly because of the long distances separating units and ferry points.

The Operational Side

The first requirement of some importance was to ferry across the Hermann Göring Division. 600 - 800 vehicles and the corresponding number of men had to be taken across daily. Although from previous experience there was no guarantee that the target figures could be achieved, in actual fact the 420 vehicles that arrived on the first day were all ferried over without hitch. On subsequent days the Division did not require the full ferry capacity, and so the remaining ferry space was used for moving other supplies.

Throughout the period of operations all requirements for ferry space were met. On the other hand, there were instances where the estimated demand was far in excess of what was actually needed. The Hermann Göring Division was a particularly crass example, and later there was the 29th Panzer Division, and others as well. It applied equally to quantities and to timetables set. The repeated outcome was that not only was urgently needed shipping space blocked, but crews and working parties were put to unnecessary strain.

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The daily ferry performance increased considerably during June and July, on some days reaching more than 1000 tons. Not once, however, was the maximum ferry capacity achieved.

Considerable difficulties lay in the way of making a precise calculation of ferry performances. Although a count was made both on board the ferry craft and ashore, considerable variations in the totals given by different stations could not be avoided. These variations, which were due to different methods of estimating as well as to errors in the rapid loading and unloading, cannot have assumed any great importance in the final result. In any case, the figures given are definitely less than the actual ferry performance. Moreover, the figures for the first weeks refer to pure ferry traffic and do not include long-range shipments.

The following are the figures for transport to Sicily, compiled from the data available:

	<u>Men</u> (no.)	<u>Vehicles</u> (no.)	<u>Supplies</u> (tons)
June	17,773	6,059	11,964
July	40,116	6,889	15,815
August	1,687	741	1,840
Total	<u>59,576</u>	<u>13,689</u>	<u>29,619</u>

And from Sicily to the mainland:

1 - 17 August	38,846	10,356	14,946
June - August	67,000	19,550	24,000

Also from 15 to 17 August, 13,500 wounded in landing craft.

With the beginning of fighting in Sicily, the movement of supplies across the water soon entered a new stage. For when it became obvious that at least a large part of the island would have to be given up, plans had to be made for the withdrawal of material stored there. The first places for consideration were the large depots at Palermo, containing about 15,000 tons of very valuable Armed Forces supplies of all kinds. In the prevailing situation, only ferry barges could be used. Ferry barges, which had been taking material to Palermo only a few days before, had now, where available, to be used for bringing material back. Unfortunately, although every effort was made, it did not prove possible to sail the few ferry barges engaged on this work more than twice. The last group of ferry barges lost three of their number through low-level air attack while outward bound and had to abandon the operation off Cape St. Stephano because of the sudden and unexpected surrender of Palermo. From this point onward, low-flying aircraft steadily intensified their attacks against our vessels and supply lines, at first in Sicily and then soon in Calabria as well. Our ferry barges came under intense low-level air attack and naval bombardment on the route to Catania, and once Catania harbour had been put out of action they could only discharge at Molini and Ionia during the night. That also put the ferry points at Occhio, Galati and Ponte Schiavo out of action.

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A.A. Defence

Once again, the A.A. defence ordered by the Air Force was completely inadequate. The problem of A.A. defence for ferry traffic had become increasingly important since the beginning of heavy enemy air activity and the almost complete absence of German fighters. At the outset the Air Force did not appreciate the need for strong A.A. protection for ferries to the extent that the Navy did, but subsequent events justified the Navy's demands. Right up to the end, however, with the exception of the Messina Strait, the Air Force was unable to provide adequate A.A. defence for the unloading stations. Naval A.A., from the ferry barges in particular, was by no means adequate defence against the many low-level attacks, although a fair number of aircraft was shot down. The enemy was unable to achieve any notable successes against ferry points where adequate light A.A. was in action, such as Catona, Gallico, Paradiso and Cannitello. If there had been sufficient supplies of ammunition, the A.A. defences in the Messina Strait would certainly have been able to achieve much greater success. The enemy's task was made enormously easier by the fact that the heavy A.A. Batterien had literally only a few rounds of ammunition available towards the end.

A most unfortunate feature in this connection was that incoming barges often did not know exactly what cargo they were carrying, or there was no means of finding out. One barge arriving with "88 mm A.A. ammunition" was sent first to Ionia and then to Messina, and finally had to be unloaded on the mainland because it was the C 41 type of 88 mm ammunition, which could only be used there. Similarly, a barge with "2 cm ammunition" was sent to Gallico: the cargo was 20 mm ammunition, but of type C 30, while the ferry barges for which the ammunition was intended could only use type C 38. These are only a few examples of the wastage that could have been avoided if accurate cargo lists had been made known at the proper time. Not only was material lost and vessels were exposed unnecessarily to danger but forces and ferry points were tied down often at the expense of more important transports.

Muddled demands concerning unloading points, inadequate A.A. defences for ferry stations and preparations for the withdrawal made it imperative that there should be frequent and direct contact with the commander-in-chief in Sicily. This contact was put on a firm footing when General Hube took over command. Immediately, disciplined organisation and a sense of purpose were apparent in the direction of ferry traffic. Close cooperation sprang up between the N.O. i/c, Sea Transport and the Quartermaster Abteilung of XIV Panzerkorps, and in the end continual personal and telephone contact between the two established the mutual confidence necessary for the successful conclusion of the operation.

Organisation

Not only was recognition accorded to the position of N.O. i/c, Sea Transport by the Army authorities, but full use was made of the N.O. i/c by Army units within the framework of their own operations. The fact that N.O. i/c, Sea Transport came directly under XIV Panzerkorps acted as a counterbalance against other Army and Air Force units. It would therefore have been in the Navy's interest to maintain this position and strengthen it as much as possible. There was no change in this position when the appointment of Colonel Baade as Fortress Commandant, Messina Strait was made and all formations in the Messina Strait were brought under his command in matters of operational administration. Colonel Baade had no powers to intervene in ferry traffic. But then the Navy appointed a Senior Officer, Patrol Forces, Messina Strait and

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a Senior Coastal Artillery Commander, Messina Strait, with the result that in the end, counting the German Chief of Staff, Messina, there were four naval stations. As Senior Officer, Patrol Forces, Captain von Kamptz felt that these stations should be merged into one organisation and on his own suggestion was made the senior naval authority. Unfortunately, at the same time he was put under the Fortress Commandant, Messina Strait, which meant that the Navy was relegated from its position of parity with the Army divisions to a much lower status. The disadvantages of having such devious service channels (XIV Panzerkorps - 1st Paratroop Division - N.O. i/c, Sea Transport) soon became apparent in the form of contradictory orders, excessive delay, and so on. Things were aggravated by the frequent absence of Captain von Kamptz, who was unable to attend any of the vital Panzerkorps meetings and was therefore never properly informed about the situation. Matters were not put right until three days after LEHRGANG had begun, when direct telephone communication with the Operations Officer of XIV Panzerkorps succeeded in eliminating all the intermediate stations (the 1st Paratroop Division had been eliminated in the meantime). In my opinion, it is absolutely essential in combined operations of this nature that the senior naval station should come directly under the army H.Q.; and I feel it is my duty to point out the drawbacks that inevitably occur when a station which has gained experience in a special job is subordinated at the last minute to one not acquainted with the circumstances. In this respect, certain disadvantages were already evident in the seniority of S.O., Patrol Forces, Messina Strait, but even worse was the appointment of Captain Diederich as the deputy of Captain Kamptz, for he arrived in the Messina Strait after LEHRGANG had begun and in the four or five days that he was there naturally could not make any impression, but could only play the role of an intermediary wholly dependent upon the N.O. i/c, Sea Transport. This intermediate office was bound to produce confusion in the Army as to the delineation of authority in the naval stations. Even in Sicily traffic, the Army - as was only natural - did not always show a complete understanding for the necessity of naval commands. It is true that misunderstandings and differences of opinion could always be put right by personal interview; but the new organisation provided an opportunity for playing off one naval station against another, which undoubtedly contributed to the prevailing lack of understanding, and only the successful outcome of ferrying convinced Army authorities of the rightness of naval orders.

If a senior naval authority was to be created, in the opinion of this command only the N.O. i/c, Sea Transport should have been considered, for it was he who had to work most closely with the army authorities and he who could never be by-passed. It must also be stated that the army authorities usually saw local breakdowns of a temporary nature and generalised on that. It is obvious that difficulties and breakdowns are permanently arising in such a large operation. The Navy cannot and must not be held responsible for every tiny wheel running smoothly. The army officer embarking on the spot is always able to ensure that loading and unloading proceed more quickly if he intervenes in the proper way. What should be taken into account is that things look different to someone who wants to be ferried over quickly himself than to those who are ferrying continuously day and night for days on end. For instance, sometimes it was objected that the ferries did not always shove off again immediately from the mainland, whereas in actual fact they were waiting until there was a berth free on the other side, where there were always one or two ferries hove to. The Navy's achievement was to have created with the smallest resources an organisation capable of fulfilling the most exacting demands, and fulfilling them on a scale previously not considered possible: so much so, in fact, that the Army never taxed it to the full.

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The crucial moment came when it became necessary to evacuate all our troops from Sicily. N.O. i/o, Sea Transport guaranteed XIV Panzerkorps that 12,500 men would be ferried over per day, together with some of their material. Ferrying was to be carried out at night only. Probably both the Army and the Navy were going on the assumption that daylight ferrying would not be possible because of fighter-bomber attacks. If daylight ferrying did prove feasible it was to be used to bring over vehicles. The other vehicles were to be destroyed. The Panzerkorps drew up a plan of operations along these lines, allowing for five nights of ferrying. Sufficient time was available for the preparation of this operation, which had the code name "Lehrgang". The Army wanted ferry routes I - IV. Routes I and II were to be allocated to the 29th and 15th Panzerdivision, routes III and IV to the Herman Goering Division, the 1st Paratroop Division and Corps H.Q. of XIV Panzerkorps.

Those in charge of sea transport expressed certain objections, based on experience, to night ferrying. In the first place, darkness presented difficulties in the matter of in-shore movement and the loading and unloading of cargo. Then there was the inevitable strain on crews and engines, and the possibility of high-level air attacks had to be taken into account at night.

When it turned out that daylight ferrying was perfectly feasible, a request was made for night ferrying to stop. The Army, however, insisted that there should be night ferrying. Nevertheless, the experience of night ferrying during Operation "Lehrgang" fully justified the misgivings of the sea transport authorities. Although the ferry nights came during the period of full moon because "Lehrgang" started late, not enough Army units arrived during the night - except for the second night - and the overall night performance remained considerably less than that of the day. Moreover, the jetties at Faro and Ganzirri (routes I and II) were so badly damaged by high-level air attacks that lasted from 2100 to 0500 that ferry traffic at these points had to be suspended for the first three nights. The devotion to duty of all crews succeeded in mastering the difficulties arising from engine strain. The craft assigned for Operation "Lehrgang" were 14 ferry barges, 8 Siebel ferries, 10 landing craft, 3 Engineer Siebel ferries, 2 A.A. ferries, 1 naval gun barge, 6 I-boats and 30 Engineer assault craft. On 7 and 8 August, however, for urgent supply reasons, an order was given from Rome for 9 ferry barges to be sent to Naples. That meant that at the beginning of Operation "Lehrgang" only 5 ferry barges were available. On 13 August the number rose to 7. When "Lehrgang" commenced at 1800 on 11 August the following craft were available: 5 ferry barges, 7 Siebel ferries, 4 Engineer Siebel ferries, 10 landing craft. The A.A. ferries, naval gun barge, I-boats and assault craft were used as reserve. On 16 August the following were available: 7 ferry barges, 6 Siebel ferries, 6 landing craft, 3 Engineer Siebel ferries, the naval gun barge, 3 A.A. ferries, 6 I-boats and W-boats, 30 assault craft. On the last day one ferry barge and 2 Siebel ferries were destroyed by bombs. The withdrawal of troops was carried out so brilliantly that the enemy did not realise the real nature of the operation until the third day of ferrying and did not make an all-out attack until the fourth day. The operation ended at 0700 on 17 August. Ferrying was stolidly maintained in the face of increasing day and night attacks by the enemy air force. Two circumstances which told considerably in the final effort are worth mentioning:

- 1) The improvement introduced by German Director of Sea Transport, Italy in the armament of ferry barges, many of which were equipped with

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37 mm and 20 mm G 38, partly from Naval Seagoing A.A. Command, South and the provision of shields for these guns. These afforded quiet and security to the gun crews and were an essential factor in the successes achieved. Both these measures should be implemented for all ferry barges and it is also considered essential that ferry barges should be equipped with a 20 mm quadruple A.A. mounting in the bows. In this context, attention is drawn to the fine successes which Siebel ferries achieved against enemy aircraft with their quadruple A.A.

2) The equipping of ferry craft with barrage balloons also proved very successful. These were filled and manipulated ashore and handed over complete to the ferries, or lowered again. Only in the case of landing craft did balloons prove impracticable, as these craft berthed so closely together that the balloon cables fouled those of neighbouring craft and the balloons broke adrift. Definite observations were made to the effect that balloons acted as a deterrent to the enemy and I consider that the ferries were more effectively protected by the balloons than the landing stages were by A.A., however strong the latter defences may have been.

Although considerable losses were sustained among ferry craft, the aim of the operation, that of withdrawing all men and vehicles to the mainland, was successfully accomplished. Tribute was paid to this achievement by the Officer Commanding, XIV Panzerkorps, General Hube, in the following signal:

"To: N.O. i/c, Sea Transport, Messina Strait,  
Captain von Liebenstein.

Weeks of severe testing, culminating in the last few days in ceaseless operations in the face of unremitting air attack, have distinguished the self-sacrifice and devotion to duty of the units under your command. To them today, on the occasion of the successful completion of the withdrawal from Sicily, I extend my special appreciation and gratitude. Their finest reward is the proud knowledge that through their sacrifice not a single German soldier, gun or vehicle has been surrendered to the enemy.

Signed: Hube  
General der Panzertruppen."

(Signed) Freiherr von Liebenstein

/Appendix

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The Choice of Sites for Ferry Points in the  
Messina Strait

The movement of Armed Forces supplies to Sicily devolved upon finding suitable points where ferry craft could load and unload. The ports at the narrows, San Giovanni and Reggio di Calabria on the mainland and Messina on the Sicilian side, were spacious and provided with up-to-date installations. But they were continually subjected to high-level bomber attacks, and very soon it became impossible to use them. The vessels used for ferrying, however, - naval ferry barges, Siebel ferries, naval gun barges, landing craft and I-boats - are not dependent upon properly constructed harbours. If the coastline allows, they can tie up anywhere there is a suitable ferry point. These ferry points had to be found in the Messina Strait. Choice of site depended upon the following factors:

- (a) the two points must lie approximately opposite each other.
- (b) Jetties had to be linked by road to the main trunk roads running parallel to the Messina Strait. Both in Calabria and south of Messina the railway line runs mostly between the shore and the main road. There are only a few tunnels under it and it was near these that the ferry points had to be situated.
- (c) An essential factor in the choice of site was that some of the jetties should be to leeward in bad weather (either northerly or southerly winds).
- (d) Changeable and difficult currents had to be taken into account.
- (e) As a precaution against air attack, jetties had to be dispersed over a wide area and also situated apart at the actual ferry points, so as to avoid serious bomb damage.
- (f) In the case of Siebel ferries it was necessary to have loading jetties 1.4 metres deep (half-tide mark).

All this was taken into consideration when the project was started to set up 12 ferry points on each side of the Messina Strait. Of these, 2 on each side were meant for landing craft, 5 for ferry barges and naval gun barges and 5 for Siebel ferries.

There was no difficulty about berths for landing craft and ferry barges.

It was sufficient to have connecting roads wide enough at the point of loading for large vehicles to manoeuvre.

From the start, one of the most difficult problems seemed to be to keep the few narrow connecting roads clear. Right up to 17 August 1943, however, no connecting roads were so badly damaged that they could not be repaired within a few hours.

The provision made for bad weather proved justified. Even in a strong wind, either the southern or northern ferry points had enough shelter for traffic to be maintained.

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At the outset Siebel ferries were loaded from "sea serpents", but there was only one on each side of the Strait, and so it was essential that jetties should be erected. Two different types of landing stage were considered.

Box-Girder Pier

In this type of construction, the piles driven into the bed were connected by planks and the resulting box form filled with stones and gravel. The advantage of this construction was that it required less wood and could be put up in a very short time. The drawback was, however, that with a strong current such as that at the northern end of the Messina Strait there was a danger of the pier being undermined or its efficiency impaired by silting.

Trestle Piers

The provision of standard piers with driven-in piles, balks and wooden decked top eliminated the problem of currents but required very much more wood and considerably longer to construct. As against four box-girder piers, therefore, only one trestle pier was erected. Both designs answered well.

According to the Pilot, the difference between high and low water in the Messina Strait is about 50 cm. But the tide gauges indicated the possibility of a difference of up to 150 cm. As, however, all reports were unanimous in stating that such a great difference only occurred on rare occasions in exceptional weather conditions, the pier was built for the normal difference, that is, upper edge of the pier 50 cm above water level. Both types of pier were only emergency solutions for such time as the tide level remained more or less stationary, and in the course of time would have had to be replaced by other piers more suitable to the changing level of water.

(Signed) Freiherr von Liebenstein.

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GLOSSARY

- B 4 -- Aviation spirit. Used in Siebel ferries.
- F (with number) -- Ferry barges. Nos.100 to 800, type A -- C: length 47 metres, breadth 6.5 metres, freeboard 2.3 metres, armament 1 x 75 mm or 1 x 37 mm gun, 1 or 2 x 20 mm quadruple turret A.A. gun. 20 mm steel plating on steering house and machine room above deck. Displacement: 155 tons. Speed 10.5 knots.
- Hohlstab -- Type of towed minesweeping gear, used for sweeping acoustic mines.
- I (with number) { -- Small craft (20 tons) armed with one 20 mm A.A. I-boat } gun. Used for ferrying, capable of carrying 40 soldiers equipped or 1 to 2 tons equipment. Speed 7 knots.
- Naval Ferry Barge -- see F
- Naval Gun Barge -- Type employed in this operation was of 130 tons displacement. Armament: 1 x 37 mm and 2 x 20 mm (4 turret) A.A. and probably steel plating. Speed 8 knots.
- Otto -- Normal M/T fuel
- Sea Serpent -- Type of pontoon bridge
- SF (with number) { -- Type employed in this operation had displacement Siebel Ferry } of 130 tons. Armament: 2 or 4 x 37 guns, 2 x 20 mm twin turret A.A. guns, no steel plating. Speed 8 knots.
- W-boat -- Whaler

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LEGEND

ROADS  
RAILWAYS  
GERMAN FERRY ROUTES  
USED DURING  
OPERATION "LEHRGANG"

ROUTE I

EVACUATION OF SICILY  
ACROSS THE  
STRAIT OF MESSINA  
11-17 AUGUST 1943

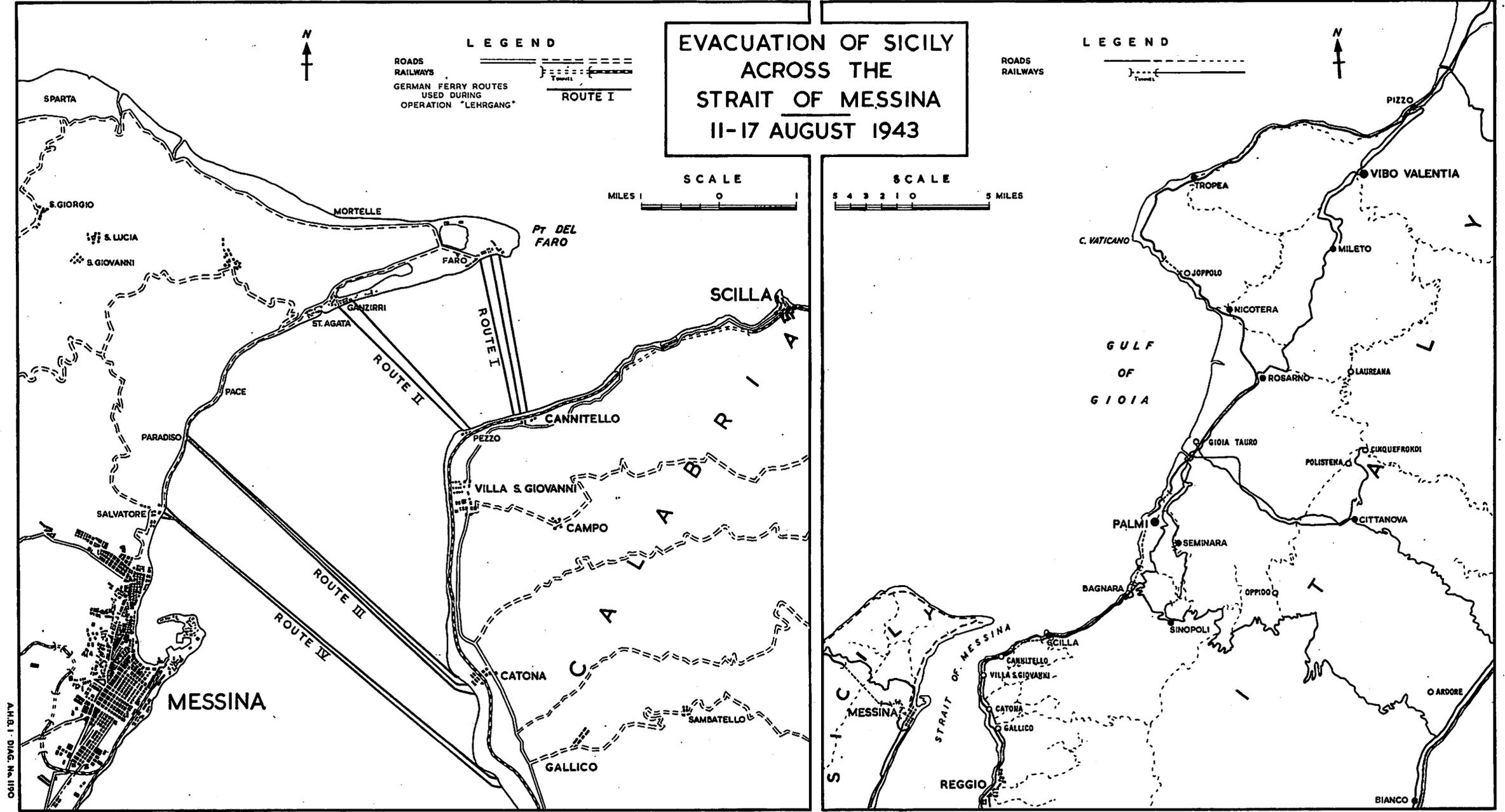
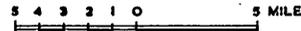
SCALE



LEGEND

ROADS  
RAILWAYS

SCALE



A.H.I. DIAG. No. 1190

SPARTA  
S. GIORGIO  
S. LUCIA  
S. GIOVANNI  
MORTELE  
Pt DEL FARO  
FARO  
ROUTE I  
GANZIRRI  
ST. AGATA  
PACE  
PARADISO  
SALVATORE  
MESSINA  
ROUTE II  
PEZZO  
CANNITELLO  
VILLA S. GIOVANNI  
CAMPO  
CATONA  
SAMBATELLO  
GALLICO

SCILLA  
C A L A B R I A  
C A L A B R I A  
C A L A B R I A  
C A L A B R I A

PIZZO  
TROPEA  
VIBO VALENTIA  
MILETO  
C. VATICANO  
COJOPPO  
NICOTERA  
ROBARNO  
LAUREANA  
GULF OF GIOIA  
GIOIA TAURO  
CINQUEFRORDI  
POLISTENA  
CITTANOVA  
PALMI  
SEMINARA  
BAGNARA  
OPPIDO  
SINOPOLI  
SCILLA  
CANNITELLO  
VILLA S. GIOVANNI  
CATONA  
GALLICO  
STRAIT OF MESSINA  
MESSINA  
REGGIO  
O ARDRE  
BIANCO



# ITALY & ADJACENT AREA

