

Navy Estimates, 1954–55

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Speaking in the House of Commons.

.....in CONTINUATION OF A PREVIOUS DEFENCE RELATED QUESTION.....

I turn now to the question of amphibious warfare, which was known as combined operations. I believe that a study of our history shows that at the start of a war we never have a force available and capable of putting into effect a maritime strategy. I wonder whether history is repeating itself again. Though, very probably, we shall see nothing on the scale of the Normandy invasion in the future, I believe that in the early stages of a war the use of atomic weapons may enable us to break through on the enemy coastline and, provided the Army is carried in mobile covered carriers, it might be possible to land and achieve considerable penetration. Added to that, the knowledge that we could land a force anywhere on the vast coastline controlled by a possible enemy would cause that enemy to tie down great numbers of men for defence purposes.

If we ever reach the stage of "broken-backed" warfare which we discussed in the House last week, these special ships and landing craft would be invaluable for landing stores and food on the beaches of this country once our ports had been put out of action. This subject is possibly not appropriate for a debate on the Navy Estimates, it is more a question for a defence debate, but I submit that, though the First Lord is not responsible for amphibious warfare, he is responsible for the provision of amphibious ships and craft.

I have looked through the Navy Estimates very carefully to discover what is being spent on new amphibious craft and I have found very little. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that we are not entirely living on our fat and that new LST and LCT are being produced, that the existing LCT can carry the new heavy Army tank, and that the new DD tanks and other "funnies" will fit into craft now in use? At present, we have no modern raiding craft. Are steps being taken to build some?

The LCA with which we are still operating are falling to bits. I speak from personal experience. Are the replacement craft being designed and—more important—being built? The operation of these minor landing craft is the task of the Royal Marines. The amphibious school at present situated in Langstone Harbour is rapidly silting up. Can my right hon. Friend assure us that the long-awaited move to Poole is at last to take place?

That brings me to my final point, the Royal Marines. Their main problem is one of recruiting.

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