

ready to land and occupy the town in the event of such surrender. Other troops were at short notice to follow the Irish Guards. The bombardment, however, did not achieve the result hoped for by the naval commander. Subsequent reports indicated that the defences were not seriously impaired, though some casualties were inflicted upon the enemy.

9. My hopes of prosecuting the land operations more vigorously were raised by the arrival on the 28th April of General Bethouart with a Demi-Brigade of Chasseurs Alpins. Two battalions of these were directed to advance, in co-operation with Norwegian forces, from the Gratangen area to Bjerkvik at the head of Herjangen Fjord. One battalion co-operated with the South Wales Borderers on the Ankenes peninsula where the latter had been landed without opposition although counter-attacked later.

Even those first class troops, the Chasseurs Alpins, trained as they are, to snow conditions, found themselves very seriously hampered, indeed almost immobilized, by the soft deep snow. Their small proportion of ski troops in each battalion and a lack of snow shoes for the remainder proved serious handicaps. They suffered severely from frost bite and snow blindness. The troops in the front line were subjected to continual low-flying air attacks against which, owing to the state of the ground, they could not adequately protect themselves either by digging or by dispersion. (Later when I was enabled to allocate a small number of light anti-aircraft guns to the French troops, the effect was excellent.) Nevertheless they made some progress and took no little toll of the enemy.

10. On 29th April I was ordered to send troops to Bodo. I accordingly despatched one company of the 1st Bn. the Scots Guards. A few days later developments at and South of Mosjoen were brought prominently to my notice by the serious effects they were having upon our Norwegian Allies, and I soon found myself concerned with two fronts—the Narvik area in the East and Mosjoen and Mo in the South. For the reasons indicated in paragraph 12 below, the Southern front caused me increasingly greater concern.

11. The arrival of a Demi-Brigade of the Foreign Legion and of a Polish Brigade, coupled with gradually improving weather conditions and an accession of much needed equipment (notably anti-aircraft artillery, a very limited number of landing craft and a French company of light tanks) facilitated the undertaking of more active operations on the Narvik front. On 8th May I instructed General Bethouart to clear up the Gratangen-Bjerkvik area and to establish artillery on the Oijord peninsula. He was then to explore the possibility of moving through the mountains against the strong German concentration in the Hundalen area East of Narvik. At the same time I instructed the 24th (Guards) Brigade (with one battalion of Chasseurs Alpins under command) to hold the Northern end of the Ankenes peninsula firmly and to advance on Beisfjord as soon as weather conditions should permit. At 0100 hours 13th May, accordingly, General Bethouart landed the Demi-Brigade of the Foreign Legion at Bjerkvik. The landing was preceded by a naval bombardment. An enemy machine-gun on the left flank was knocked out by a destroyer's

guns. At this point three light tanks from motor landing craft and about 120 infantry from assault landing craft (followed by infantry from ships' boats) were able to land with little loss and so to work their way round the head of the Fjord to deal with the remaining machine-guns, on the beaches, which had not been affected by the naval bombardment. Distant machine guns were still in action when the second battalion landed on the East shore about 2 hours later.

The operation was entirely successful. Without the use of tanks and armoured landing craft it might very easily have ended in a costly failure. It was fortunate indeed that low clouds prevented hostile air attack during the landing.

Touch was made with the force operating from Gratangen. The Oijord peninsula was seized. The stage was now set for the capture of Narvik.

12. Meanwhile the situation in the South was causing me some concern. Continued German advances in that area were having most serious results upon our Norwegian Allies and, indeed seemed likely to result in the withdrawal of all Norwegian support from the Allied forces. I considered that the time had come to stop these enemy advances and I welcomed Lord Cork's suggestion on 9th May that troops should be despatched with that object. I had been in constant touch with Colonel Gubbins and two companies of Scissors Force at Mosjoen and with one company of that Force, under Major May, at Mo. After the abandonment of Mosjoen I decided that energetic measures must be taken and accordingly sent the 1st Bn. the Scots Guards (less one company already at Bodo), with field and anti-aircraft guns, to Mo. Mo was doubly important as being the terminus of the most northerly road into Sweden and as covering the Norwegian aerodrome a few miles to the North. Should this aerodrome fall into the hands of the enemy it would afford him just that extra stepping stone he needed to bring further air forces into action in the Narvik area.

This detachment arrived at Mo at 0400 hours 12th May without loss. Colonel Gubbins with his two companies from Mosjoen had meanwhile withdrawn to Bodo.

At the same time I instituted arrangements for reinforcing the detachment at Mo with Headquarters 24th (Guards) Brigade and 1st Bn. The Irish Guards. Before these arrangements were completed and put into effect (they were subsequently modified) I handed over command to my successor.

13. It will be apparent from the preceding paragraphs that the period of my command was perforce chiefly one of reconnaissance and planning and of carrying out such initial offensive operations as the climatic conditions and the gradual building up of my force to a reasonable fighting organisation permitted. At the same time the task of setting the administrative organisation on a sound basis fitted to deal with projected operations and with future expansion made tremendous calls upon the initiative and powers of improvisation of my staff, all under Arctic conditions of great, though decreasing, severity. Subsidiary bases were established at Skaanland on Sundet Fjord and in Ballangen south of the Ofot Fjord.

14. I wish to place on record my deep appreciation of the co-operation and assistance