

the East, and the forward troops had to fight hard for a time to maintain their positions; this forward movement by the enemy enabled him to bring the landing beach under fire for an appreciable period during which Commandant Paris, Chief of Staff to General Bethouart, was killed in a landing craft. The counter attack was beaten off, and the advance inland resumed. Two French tanks were also ferried across in motor landing craft and landed successfully, but unfortunately they were bogged on the beach and played no part in the operation for the capture of the town.

66. Arrangements had been made for a continuous patrol to be flown by our two squadrons of fighter aircraft over the area throughout the operation. This was carried out from 1915 hours on 27th May until 1615 hours on 29th May with the one brief enforced interval mentioned below. No enemy aircraft appeared in the area until about 0500 hours, a circumstance which seems to show that the operation came as a surprise to the enemy. Unfortunately just about this time our own aircraft became fogbound on Bardu Foss aerodrome, 50 miles to the North and could no longer protect the ships and troops. From 0500 hours to 0700 hours numerous enemy aircraft, often flying in formation, made repeated bombing attacks upon H.M. Ships round Narvik and on the troops on shore. By this time, however, the task of the ships had been substantially completed, and, by constant manoeuvring, they succeeded in avoiding serious damage, though the flagship, *H.M.S. Cairo*, was hit by two bombs and lost 30 men killed and wounded. The casualties to the landing forces from bombing amounted to only one small craft loaded with ammunition.

67. Once the initial landing had succeeded the progress of General Bethouart's troops was steady and continuous. From reports subsequently received it appears that the enemy withdrew in considerable haste eastwards along the Beisfjord, and by 2200 hours the whole Peninsula west of a line from Fagernes to Forsneset was in French hands, together with some 200 prisoners.

68. After an initial set-back the Polish troops also pressed forward along the Ankenes Peninsula and established themselves on high ground overlooking Beisford.

69. Thus ended an operation which, in my opinion, reflects great credit on the judgment and pertinacity of General Bethouart and on the fighting qualities of his troops. Reconnaissance after the capture of the town revealed the full difficulties of landing on the beaches close to the town and the wisdom of the plan finally adopted. Though he knew of the decision to evacuate Norway before the operation started, General Bethouart persevered with his plan and the vigour with which the advance eastwards was pressed after the capture of the town drove the enemy back on to his main position covering Sildvik and Hundalen, thus making it difficult for him to attempt a counter-attack against Narvik at short notice; this enabled the subsequent evacuation to be carried out under more favourable tactical conditions than at one time seemed likely.

70. Nevertheless, it is my considered opinion that the operation was carried out with the barest margin of safety, and for this reason

might well have resulted in failure. Not only had the strength of the first echelon to be put ashore to be limited to 290 men, but this small force had to maintain itself unsupported for forty-five minutes. Had the enemy been able to launch an immediate counter attack the result might have been disastrous. It must always, in my opinion, be unwise to embark on operations of this character unless landing craft are available to land a first flight of adequate strength, and, in addition, provide an adequate floating reserve to meet unforeseen contingencies. Moreover, the absence of bomber aircraft deprived the attack of one of the most effective means of repulsing an enemy counter attack, as has already been mentioned the broken and intricate nature of the ground prevented accurate observation by the supporting ships and artillery. The risk, however, was, in my opinion, worth taking, and, as things turned out, was justified.

71. I wish particularly to commend the work of Commander Hubback, R.N., of the Naval Staff, upon whom rested practically the whole responsibility for the co-ordination of the Naval share in the operation with that of the French troops. It is no exaggeration to say that the success of the operation was largely due to his unremitting application to the work in hand, and his excellent judgment and sound common-sense. The work of the Naval officers and ratings who manned the landing craft and supervised the difficult task of embarkation and disembarkation on open beaches, often under fire, was, in my opinion, magnificent and deserving of the highest praise.

#### *The evacuation of Bodo.*

72. Prior to the receipt of instructions from His Majesty's Government to evacuate Northern Norway, it had been my intention to use every means to reinforce the troops in the Bodo area. I had already in mind a plan to send down a battalion of Chasseurs Alpin, in order to have troops specially trained in mountain warfare to oppose the advance of the German infantry which was being carried out with great skill and vigour. Once the decision to evacuate Norway had been made however, it was obvious that the evacuation of the troops from Bodo must be carried out as promptly as possible, as I had already received reports from Brigadier Gubbins that, without further reinforcements, he was doubtful whether he could hold on for more than a few days.

73. On receipt of the instructions for evacuation from the Chiefs of Staff I therefore immediately despatched Colonel Dowler, my G.S.O.1, to Bodo in a destroyer, which was conveying the last company of the South Wales Borderers to join the rest of its battalion, to concert plans with Brigadier Gubbins for the withdrawal of his force.

74. In view of the heavy and repeated air attacks which were being made upon the town, docks and aerodrome at Bodo, it was decided in consultation with Lord Cork, that evacuation by destroyers provided the best chance of evacuating personnel without serious loss. This decision meant abandoning the few wheeled vehicles and guns with the force, but in view of my instructions that the first consideration was to save personnel, and also in view of the fact that no suitable ship for embarking wheeled vehicles and stores was immediately available, no other course was practicable.