

makes it impossible to extend our boundaries, which were notified yesterday, further to the right.

We must therefore, with regret, say that we have no longer any forces available to fill the gap in the direction of Ypres.

As regards the withdrawal to the Yser the idea must be ruled out since it would destroy our fighting units more quickly than the battle now in progress, and this without loss to the enemy."

On receipt of this information, on the morning of 26th May, I asked the Secretary of State to bring strong pressure on the Belgian Government to withdraw their Army westwards and to maintain touch with the B.E.F. I also communicated in the same sense to Sir Roger Keyes, but his reply never reached my Headquarters.

#### *26th May—The Southern and Western fronts.*

46. On the remainder of the front 26th May was marked by heavy air action everywhere. The enemy attack on the French North African division at Carvin which was in progress when I visited General Blanchard at Attiches, was driven back by the prompt action of two battalions of 50th Division which were deployed behind the French troops. 2nd and 44th Divisions reacted against the enemy and both succeeded in advancing some distance westwards from Merville and Hazebrouck respectively towards the Canal.

Further north, the French had completed the relief of all our troops on the river Aa from St. Momelin northwards but had themselves begun in places to withdraw towards the Mardyck Canal. It therefore became the more necessary to strengthen further the defences of Bergues, and this was carried out under the orders of 48th Division.

#### *Plans for final withdrawal.*

47. On this evening (26th May), I put in hand my plans for a final withdrawal. I was uncertain how far I should be successful in withdrawing the whole of the B.E.F. within the bridgehead at Dunkirk, nor could I judge how much fighting my troops would have to undertake during the withdrawal.

I had, therefore, asked the War Office whether it would be possible to send out an infantry brigade of the 1st Canadian Division so as to provide a nucleus of fresh and well trained troops on the bridgehead position. This request was at once agreed to, and orders were given to despatch the Brigade to Dunkirk on the night 26th/27th May. These orders were, however, cancelled on 28th May.

The contraction of the B.E.F. area and the shortening of its Lines of Communication was now making it possible to dispense with a number of the rearward units. I had already issued orders for the embarkation of a number of key personnel who could be spared so as to ease the supply situation which was becoming acute. I now ordered the withdrawal of all units which were not required to continue the battle. This policy involved leaving most of the fighting troops until the last, but if full use was to be made of the shipping available, and congestion avoided on the beaches, no other course was possible.

The task of organising a bridgehead at Dunkirk, and of arranging the details of embarkation

was likely to prove an exacting one: work had to begin at once, and my own headquarters were fully occupied with the withdrawal of the forward troops.

I therefore appointed Lieut-General Sir Ronald Adam to undertake this duty, and sent with him my Quarter-Master-General and other staff officers from G.H.Q. He was to take command of the troops already in the area, make arrangements for the troops of 1st, 2nd and 3rd Corps who would be withdrawing into the bridgehead and arrange for the embarkation. He was to act in conformity with the orders of General Fagalde, provided that these did not imperil the safety and welfare of British troops.

Sir Ronald Adam accordingly handed over command of the 3rd Corps to Major-General S. R. Wason (till then Major-General R.A. at G.H.Q.), and took up his duties on the morning of 27th May.

At 7 a.m. that morning he attended a conference at Cassel as my representative. At this conference there were present Admiral Abrial and General Fagalde from Dunkirk, General Blanchard, General Prioux, now in command of the French 1st Army, and General Koeltz who was representing General Weygand.

Sir Ronald Adam and General Fagalde arrived early, and before the conference began they had the opportunity to reach general agreement on the organisation of the bridgehead position.

The perimeter was to extend from Gravelines south-eastwards to the Canal de la Colme, along the canal to Bergues and thence by Furnes and Nieuport to the Belgian coast. In fact, the French were by now evacuating Gravelines and the western part of the perimeter, and in process of going back to the line of the Mardyck Canal from the sea to Spyker, on the Canal de la Colme. The French were to be responsible for the defence of the western half of the perimeter as far as Bergues inclusive, and the British for the eastern half. By this time, the position of the Belgian Army was so obscure that the possibility of its being included in the bridgehead was not taken into account, though the perimeter could of course have been extended eastwards to include them if necessary.

Sir Ronald Adam then explained to General Fagalde his plan for Corps boundaries, assembly areas and the layout of beaches. He specially stressed the importance of avoiding traffic congestion in the perimeter and said that he had decided to allow no British transport north of the canals except such as was strictly necessary for tactical, supply or medical purposes. He urged General Fagalde to issue similar orders to the French troops under his command. He also suggested that the French troops entering the bridgehead position should all be located in the western part of the perimeter. However, it appeared that these orders did not reach all the French troops, who brought a quantity of transport into the sector.

These matters were later reviewed at the full conference, but the principal business was the issue by General Koeltz of an order of the day by General Weygand.

This enjoined a resolute attitude on the part of every leader, and the counter-offensive wherever possible. General Koeltz then proceeded to urge Generals Blanchard and Fagalde to attempt the recapture of Calais and, though