

On 1st June Sir Cecil Dormer, H.M. Minister in Norway, and Colonel Pollock flew from Tromsø and discussed His Majesty's Government's instructions regarding the procedure to be adopted towards the Norwegian Government with Lord Cork and myself and then returned by air to Tromsø.

On 2nd June a telegram from Sir Cecil Dormer urging postponement of the commencement of the evacuation for twenty-four hours to enable the Norwegian Government to get into touch with the Swedish Government was received. Lord Cork discussed the suggestion with me, with General Bethouart present, and, as a result, the postponement was agreed to.

55. In order to make it easier for the Norwegian troops to extricate themselves when the French finally withdrew from the neighbourhood of Narvik, I wrote to General Fleischer on 2nd June asking him to withdraw his battalion in Narvik to North of Rombaks Fjord.

#### *The Capture of Narvik.*

56. After the successful landing near Bjerkevik and the subsequent operations which resulted in the clearing of the Oijord Peninsula and the North shore of the Rombaks Fjord as far East as Lilleberget, General Bethouart continued, in accordance with my instructions, to perfect his plans for the capture of Narvik. Until the ground North of the Eastern entrance of the Rombaks Fjord had been cleared an assault on Narvik would have had to be launched on difficult beaches which were believed to be strongly defended by machine guns. Furthermore, such an operation could not have come as a surprise, since the ships and landing craft would have had to be marshalled in Ofot Fjord in daylight in full view of the enemy.

57. Our hold on the Northern shore of Rombaks Fjord widened the front on which the attack could be launched and permitted it to be supported by French field artillery, established North of Oijord. The first echelon of attackers, with the necessary landing craft could now be assembled secretly under cover of Oijordneset point and emerge thence less than a mile from their objective behind the bombarding ships of the Royal Navy.

58. After careful reconnaissance, General Bethouart decided to land the first flight at a beach East of Orneset, and subsequently to transfer a total of three battalions, including a Norwegian battalion, across the Rombaks Fjord from Oijord by motor landing craft. When established ashore, this force, having first blocked the approach of enemy reinforcements from Sildvik by securing a strong position astride the railway, was to advance across the Peninsula and take the town from the rear.

59. The assault on Narvik was to be accompanied by an attack towards Beisfjord by the Polish troops established on the Ankenes Peninsula, with the objects of containing enemy troops in that area, and of threatening the enemy's line of retreat from Narvik by the road running along the North shore of the Beisfjord.

60. The landing operation was rendered particularly hazardous by the scarcity of landing craft which, owing to enemy action and mechanical breakdown, had been reduced to three assault landing craft and two motor landing craft. This meant that the number of

men in the first landing party had to be reduced to 290, the numerical weakness of which caused considerable anxiety both to General Bethouart and myself.

61. The operation was originally intended to take place on the night 24/25th May, but at a conference with General Bethouart on 23rd May I came to the conclusion that unless the weather was very propitious it would be an unjustifiable risk to undertake it with the support of only one fighter squadron of aircraft, in view of the strength and efficiency of the enemy bombers. I decided therefore that it should be postponed until after the arrival of the Hurricane fighter squadron which was due on 27th May. Lord Cork agreed with this decision.

62. After taking this decision the news of the intention of His Majesty's Government to evacuate Northern Norway was received, and it became necessary to consider whether the operation was to be proceeded with or not. After consulting General Bethouart, I recommended to Lord Cork that it should be carried out as intended on the night of 27/28th May. In doing so I considered that, apart from the desirability of making sure whether the facilities for shipping ore from Narvik had in fact been destroyed as thoroughly as had been reported, the chances that a successful attack would do much to conceal our intention to evacuate the country in the immediate future would outweigh the possible disadvantages involved in extending our commitments by establishing troops in close contact with the enemy on the Narvik Peninsula, where his main force was thought to be located.

63. The operations were timed to begin at 2340 hours on 27th May when three cruisers and five destroyers steamed into position in the mouth of the Rombaks Fjord and commenced their bombardment. Admiral Lord Cork flew his flag in *H.M.S. Cairo* in which ship I accompanied him, together with General Bethouart and his Staff. *H.M.S. Southampton* was detached to work at the mouth of Narvik Harbour to afford support to the Polish troops on the Ankenes Peninsula. The Naval bombardment on the Narvik Peninsula was on a wide front, the targets selected being the mouths of the tunnels of the railway and other suspected machine gun and artillery positions. The fire of the guns of the ships and the French field artillery was heavy and accurate, but close support of the attacking troops was hampered throughout by the broken nature of the terrain and the difficulty of accurate observation in the birch scrub which covered the lower slopes of the hills.

64. The initial landing was hardly opposed and was accomplished with little loss, the first contingent of troops quickly being successfully established on shore. The subsequent movement of troops across the Rombaks Fjord was hampered for short periods by a small gun firing from further to the East on the South shore. This gun caused some casualties, but was soon silenced by Naval gun fire, and by 0330 hours one battalion of the Foreign Legion and the Narvik battalion of the Norwegian Army were ashore on the Peninsula.

65. While this operation was in progress, the enemy launched a strong counter attack from