

was provided at these river crossings. The weather was fine throughout the whole period of the move.

The first stage was one hundred and twenty miles. An average of five hundred vehicles moved daily over each stage of the route, maintaining a distance of one hundred yards between each vehicle as a precaution against air attack. A halt of one day for maintenance purposes was made after the first day's move.

In the initial stages of the move, the Provost service were responsible for the regulation of traffic, but on entering the French Zone des Armees, columns came under the direction of the French road control (Regulatrice Routiere) organisation, which gave valuable help in marking detours and in directing traffic through towns. A French-speaking British officer was established in Amiens to ensure liaison between my headquarters and the French authorities.

Breakdowns and accidents were few, which reflects great credit on the drivers, who were unaccustomed to long hours at the wheel and to driving on the right-hand side of the road. Among the many important lessons which were learnt during the largest road movement ever undertaken with motor transport by any British Army were the need for early reconnaissance of staging areas, for control at the dispersal points, and for allowance for unforeseen delays.

11. The move forward continued without incident or interruption, and on the agreed date, 3rd October, 1st Corps took over from the French the sector Maulde-Gruson on the Belgian frontier. This sector lay between that of the 1st French Army and of the 16th French Corps, with 2nd Division (Major-General H. C. Loyd) on the right and 1st Division (Major-General Hon. H. R. L. G. Alexander) on the left.

General Headquarters opened in and around Habarcq (8 miles west of Arras) on 2nd October.

On 12th October, 3rd Division of 2nd Corps (Major-General B. L. Montgomery) moved into the line between Bouvines and Lannoy, relieving the left brigade of 1st Corps and the right regiment of the French 51st Division. 4th Division of the same Corps (Major-General D. G. Johnson, V.C.) was located in General Headquarters reserve.

The initial occupation of the line by the British Expeditionary Force was thus completed and the organisation of the position was undertaken at once.

#### *The Organisation of the British Positions.*

12. In allotting sectors the geographical features of the pronounced salient occupied by the British Expeditionary Force had to be considered. East of the Tournai-Orchies road the country is flat, much wooded and intersected by small streams. Further to the north lies open and undulating agricultural land which lends itself to artillery observation and to the movement of armoured fighting vehicles. Further north again the sector is for the most part on the fringe of a highly industrial and mining district.

When 1st Corps arrived in the sector assigned to the British Expeditionary Force in the first week in October, an almost continuous anti-tank obstacle already existed in the form of a ditch covered by concrete blockhouses built to mount anti-tank guns and machine guns. In accordance with plans prepared in peace time

certain French technical troops continued to work in the sector under the command of the French Commander of the Defensive Sector of Lille, Colonel (now Général de Brigade) Bertschi.

While defences continued to develop on the lines of the original plan, based on the close defence of the frontier, it was also necessary to organise the position.

The priority of work envisaged the eventual construction of three positions in the forward area, and a Corps reserve position was sited across the base of the Lille salient formed by the frontier. Further in rear, a second position had been sited, following the line of the Haute Deule, Sensée and La Bassée canals.

The whole scheme involved the immediate construction of field defences and the duplication of the anti-tank obstacle in the forward zone.

It was consequently necessary to construct at an early stage reinforced concrete "pill-boxes" to afford protection to those weapons which formed the backbone of the fire defence throughout the whole depth of the position. In order to save time standard designs were prepared to accommodate both British and French weapons.

13. Work on these "pill-boxes" was begun by the Royal Engineers, assisted by other arms. Early in November a specially constituted force composed of twelve field companies of the Royal Engineers drawn from Territorial Army Divisions at home, and known as "X Force," arrived in the British Expeditionary Force area. This force had its own transport and special plant for the construction of reinforced concrete "pill-boxes" by mass production methods. It was accompanied by companies of the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps.

A special Excavator Company, equipped with mechanical excavators of various types, arrived at the same time as X Force. It has been employed in digging anti-tank ditches, burying signal cables, constructing breastworks, and other tasks.

A creation of such a defensive system demanded a quantity and variety of engineer stores far exceeding pre-war anticipations.

Bad weather in October and November, and a succession of frosts later, considerably delayed the work, but by the end of the period covered by this despatch the position had been developed in considerable depth. A large number of concrete "pill-boxes" had been completed and many others were under construction; new wire had been erected and existing wire strengthened, buildings had been reinforced, and many miles of anti-tank ditch dug.

#### *The Saar Detachment.*

14. In November, 1939, I arranged with General Georges that a British infantry brigade should take its place in the line on the Saar front, under the command of a French Division.

The brigade took over the sector from the French 42nd Division on the 4th December without enemy interference and during the period under review conditions were quiet.

Since that date infantry brigades of the British Expeditionary Force have successively completed short tours of duty in this sector, and junior leaders have thus had valuable training in their day to day duties when in contact with the enemy.