

19. On 23rd April General Carton de Wiart sent a signal to the War Office that evacuation from Namsos might be advisable, since the scale of enemy air attack was heavy and he had received no further information about the proposed landing of an Allied force at Trondheim.

In reply General Carton de Wiart was instructed by Headquarters North Western Expeditionary Force to keep his force in being and to remain on the defensive in the Namsos area.

20. For the first time on 25th April British aircraft appeared over Namsos. These belonged to the Fleet Air Arm, but three were forced to land owing to lack of petrol. Their intervention, though temporary, had a beneficial effect on the air situation, but since their effect could not be sustained, enemy air activity was again unhampered during the next few days.

On account of the deep snow, which prevented movement off the roads, it was not until 26th April that a reconnaissance party of the R.A.F. started to search for landing grounds in the Namsos area.

21. On the following day the advanced party of General Carton de Wiart's staff arrived. Until now he had made use of the services of Captains Fleming and Lindsay (of the Military Intelligence Directorate) and of one General Staff Officer who had reported for duty on 23rd April at Namsos.

In the same ship as the advanced party of the staff there arrived a Royal Marine Howitzer battery, a field ambulance, a dock labour company, representatives of the base sub-area organisation, rifles and ammunition for the Norwegians, and many other natures of stores, but owing to the fact that the quay side was already piled high with French stores and that a French ship was still alongside the one usable jetty unloading transport and equipment, only the party of headquarter staff, a portion of the howitzer battery (but no ammunition) and some dock labour could be got ashore.

22. Such was the situation at Namsos when on 28th April General Carton de Wiart received the message that the evacuation of Namsos had been decided on in principle.

At a meeting with Admiral Vivian (Flag Officer commanding 20 Cruiser Squadron), General Audet and Brigadier Phillips, he decided to plan for evacuation on two successive nights. In the meantime it was possible to send away one French battalion on the night 28th/29th April in an empty ship.

It was decided that the French contingent should re-embark before the British, but that the French would leave some ski troops to operate with the British rearguard. The probable dates for evacuation were the nights of 1st/2nd and 2nd/3rd May.

On the night 28th/29th April a battery of Bofors guns was landed at Namsos. These guns were unfortunately without predictors.

23. On the following day General Carton de Wiart received the message instructing him to send a detachment to Mosjoen by sea and to post a rearguard at Grong which would delay the enemy for as long as possible and then withdraw Northwards overland to Mosjoen.

At first he appears to have been in some doubt as to whether the rearguard at Grong was intended to comprise his whole force, and he referred the matter to this Headquarters. The reply made it clear that the strength of

the rearguard to remain at Grong was left entirely to his discretion. I have referred in Part I to the abandonment of this operation.

On the 30th April, a party of 100 French Chasseurs and a British detachment with two Bofors guns was sent by destroyer to Mosjoen. Throughout that day, enemy aircraft were again active and sank H.M.S. "Bittern" and two trawlers.

24. On 1st May all arrangements were made to evacuate the French contingent, and by 2115 hours all were ready on the quayside. But no transports or destroyers arrived owing to thick fog in the Namsen Fiord, and the evacuation had to be postponed for 24 hours.

25. On 2nd May General Carton de Wiart was asked to carry out the evacuation in one night if possible, instead of two, as the Admiralty were anxious to complete the task with all speed.

After consultation with Admiral Vivian it was agreed that all troops could be got away on the night 2nd/3rd May but that no stores or equipment could be saved.

26. By 0150 hours on 3rd May all troops except a small rear party were re-embarked and the convoy sailed from Namsos.

At 0220 hours the destroyer "Afridi" took off the rear party.

At 0430 hours the usual German air reconnaissance came over Namsos and sighted the convoy which was now well out to sea.

Between 0800 hours and 1530 hours wave after wave of enemy bombers attacked H.M. Ships and the transports. No transport ship was hit, but the French destroyer "Bison" and H.M.S. "Afridi" were sunk fighting to the end. The losses might well have been far heavier, for there were no air forces supporting the convoy.

COMMENTS.

27. In view of the instructions issued to him and the size of the force which according to those instructions was eventually to be placed at his disposal, General Carton de Wiart's action in pushing straight ahead towards Trondheim was justified. Had he been aware of the limited forces which were actually to be placed at his disposal and of the fact that the direct attack on Trondheim was not to take place, his advance would undoubtedly have been a more methodical one, and his position at Steinkjer would have been consolidated before a further advance would have been considered. The position of the 146th Infantry Brigade, with its head at Verdalen and its right flank open to attack from the Fiord by sea-borne troops, was, as events proved, a somewhat dangerous one.

The withdrawal of this Brigade when attacked was cleverly planned and executed and reflects great credit on Brigadier Phillips and the troops under his command.

28. I have already commented in Part I, paragraph 8, on the decision not to dispatch a force by road to delay the enemy in his advance on Mosjoen after the final evacuation took place. The importance of this operation was strongly stressed in several telegrams from these headquarters, its feasibility could only be left to the judgment of the man on the spot. In this case an error of judgment was made.