

Cavalry Divisions. The whole of this force was completely sundered from the X Corps on its right by the penetration of the German tanks.

7. Meanwhile, owing to the threat developing to the British base at Rouen, General Sir Henry Karslake, G.O.C. the Lines of Communication, had scraped together an improvised force for its local defence. This force comprised nine infantry battalions of a sort; they consisted partly of second line Territorial units sent out to France for pioneer duties and partly of composite units made up from miscellaneous reinforcements at the base. They had no war equipment except rifles and a few odd Bren guns and anti-tank weapons, which they had never fired before. They were without artillery, means of transport and signal equipment. They were placed under the command of Brigadier Beauman, in charge of the North District, Lines of Communication. Very unfortunately this heterogeneous collection of untrained and ill-equipped units was given the title of a Division. The French were thus misled into thinking that it was a fighting formation, complete with artillery and ancillary services. Beauman's so-called Division had been given the task of holding a back line along the rivers Bethune and Andelle covering Rouen, and had done good work in organizing the defence of this position.

8. While the German armoured attack was at its height on the afternoon of the 7th June, General Weygand personally visited Tenth Army Headquarters east of Rouen and impressed on General Altmayer, and on General Evans commanding the British Armoured Division, the necessity for holding the German attack on the Seine at all costs as this was "the decisive battle of the war."

It was now becoming obvious that to enable the IX Corps to fall back in good order to the line of the Lower Seine, a cover position would have to be held along the river Andelle, some 12 miles east of Rouen. General Evans, therefore, at once ordered his 3rd Armoured Brigade (in fact reduced to some four weak squadrons of 30 tanks in all) to stiffen up the right flank of Beauman's defensive line.

9. On the 8th June the German armoured drive continued on the axis Amiens-Rouen, and succeeded in penetrating the weak British defences on the watershed between the rivers Andelle and Bethune, west of Forges-Les-Eaux. Beauman's ill-equipped units, with the British tanks supporting them, fell back to the line of the Seine. That night German armoured units penetrated into Rouen, and the French Tenth Army lost all touch from then onward with its IX Corps in the Rouen-Dieppe cul-de-sac.

10. The 51st Division was thus completely cut off from its proper line of retirement via Rouen. This was mainly due to the failure or inability of the French High Command to withdraw their left wing while there was still time and space for this manoeuvre. Throughout all these operations it was becoming clear that the French High Command was issuing "die in the last ditch" orders, which their troops had no intention of carrying out. From this time onwards, until the final evacuation of the B.E.F. on the 18th, it was obvious that the spirit of the French Army was crushed and that it had little intention of offering serious resist-

ance. This spirit was also shared by the higher commanders; beginning on the 8th June the Tenth French Army Headquarters literally ceased to function for 48 hours; it had lost all touch, and its X Corps was broken and in full retreat.

11. The Germans had on the 9th June reached the line of the Seine and had established bridgeheads at several points. The 3rd Armoured Brigade and Beauman's fragmentary units were withdrawn to reorganize, and the 2nd Armoured Brigade, which had been refitting at Louviers, was put in to support General de la Laurencie's III Corps which was trying to hold the Seine crossings south of Rouen. It was now apparent that the German armoured units and air force were being employed elsewhere, while three army corps were detached to drive south-west towards Alençon with a view to separating the Tenth French Army from the Armée de Paris.

12. It was at this critical juncture that the 52nd Division was hastily sent out to France. Its leading brigade, the 157th, under an able and cool-headed commander, Brigadier Sir John Laurie, was rushed up and placed under the orders of the Tenth French Army. On the night of 12th/13th June it took over the right sector of the III Corps front east of Conches, in a very exposed position, with a gap of eight miles on its right, and two newly arrived French battalions on its left west of Evreux.

As none of the 52nd Divisional Artillery had yet arrived, the 157th Brigade was given the support of some French batteries.

13. On 14th June the Germans renewed their pressure on the Tenth French Army front, but most of their tanks and aircraft appeared to have been diverted on a south-easterly axis towards Paris. A fairly sharp infantry attack developed on the left flank of the 157th Infantry Brigade, which suffered some 50 casualties, and the French infantry on their left, as well as the French artillery supporting them, retired hastily, leaving the brigade in the lurch. As a result of this pressure the Tenth French Army withdrew south-west a distance of 30 miles to the wooded area north-west of Mortagne. As the Armée de Paris was retiring almost due south on the Loire, this divergence of the lines of retreat of the two armies created a gap of some 30 miles on the right flank of the Tenth Army.

14. In conformity with this withdrawal the 157th Brigade moved back and took up a front of eight miles astride the Mortagne-Verneuil road, with the French Cavalry Corps on its right. On the night of the 14th/15th I was placed by General Brooke in command of all the British troops operating with the Tenth French Army, and was ordered to withdraw them towards Cherbourg for re-embarkation, whilst still co-operating, so far as possible, with the French withdrawal. It had been my intention to leave the 157th Brigade in the line until mid-day on the 19th before withdrawing it, in order to allow General Altmayer to re-adjust his front. I notified General Altmayer of this intention on the 16th, and he appreciated the respite granted him.

15. On the 16th June, however, the German motorized columns had already followed up swiftly the French withdrawal, and the 157th Brigade was attacked all day. The French units on its right and left retired without making any