

dropped bombs and flares on likely targets. Fortunately this aircraft was shot down by our troops early in the engagement and thus the Norwegian battery was able to shoot unmolested.

About 1800 hours Brigadier Kent Lemon sent a reassuring message to the effect that he was confident he could hold the enemy, and that he was adopting an aggressive attitude. The train was assembled in the Dombås tunnel, wherein it lay all day. This tunnel was indeed providential throughout the operations. It housed trains, rations, ammunition and stores, and was a secure refuge for the Norwegian station staff, without whose help the system could not have been maintained.

54. During the afternoon it was discovered that owing to a misunderstanding Brigadier Morgan had withdrawn his anti-parachute detachments at Lesja, Lesjaverk and Lesjaskog. This might have had serious results as all Norwegian troops had also been withdrawn from this area. The Anti-Tank Company was therefore sent back to occupy Lesja against parachute attack, and to meet a possible threat by German ski troops using the Vagamo-Lesja road.

Throughout the day there had been considerable doubt as to whether the line was clear to Åndalsnes; but by 1700 hours it was reported in working order, and the withdrawal started according to plan. The train started a little late, but both it and the rear parties in Motor Transport got away well and the road and railway demolitions West of Dombås were blown.

The train stopped at Lesja to pick up the Anti-Tank Company and 300 Norwegian Infantry—the last Norwegian troops to be withdrawn.

55. Headquarters moved back by motor transport and efforts were made en route by telephone to find out the progress of the train. These were unsuccessful until Verma (19 miles from Åndalsnes) was reached. There the unwelcome news was learned that there was a break in the line near Lesjaskog. The train had been wrecked by a bomb crater. Both engines had overturned, the front coach had telescoped and there were a good many casualties. This meant that the troops would have a 17 miles march to the nearest shelter which was in the tunnel at Verma.

A staff officer was sent to get Marines up from Romsdalshorn to cover the Verma Gorge and to get as much transport forward as he could to help the troops in their journey from Lesjaskog to Verma.

56. At 0100 hours the troops set out on their long march to Verma. It was, of course, too much to hope that they would gain the security of the Verma tunnel before the early enemy air patrols were active, but it was very desirable that as many as possible should have crossed the open Lesjaskog plateau and have reached the comparative safety of the Verma Gorge.

The Marines came up about 0530 hours and established a road block near the scene of the train wreck which they held till 1000 hrs., subsequently withdrawing to cover the first of a series of demolitions arranged in the Verma Gorge.

With the aid of some motor transport all the troops were in the tunnel by 0900 hours, but their destination had been spotted by the enemy aircraft and many of them had been subjected to low flying attacks on their way back.

The tunnel merits description. In it was a loaded ammunition train; the train which was the only means of reaching Åndalsnes, and 1,500 troops, who were packed like sardines and filled the tunnel completely. The tunnel itself ran through the side of a hill and was bomb proof.

57. Throughout the morning the men slept, disturbed occasionally by bombing and low flying machine gun attacks on the entrances to the tunnel. In the afternoon they began to recover and their spirits were remarkably good, giving proof once again of the high powers of endurance of the British soldier.

A conference was held at 1600 hours at which orders for the withdrawal to Åndalsnes were issued. The train was to start at 2230 hours and the rear parties by motor transport at 2300 hours.

At about 1730 the engine in the tunnel began to get up steam and the tunnel filled with dense smoke. It was necessary to get the men out of the tunnel and accept the risk of their detection. They behaved very steadily and went quickly outside to disperse.

58. At about 1800 hours a message came in reporting that the Marines at the head of the Gorge had broken and the enemy had made contact in some strength.

Both K.O.Y.L.I. and Green Howards deployed immediately and the former sent back one company some 2,000 yards up the Gorge to reinforce a platoon of Green Howards already in position.

The Norwegian station-master was asked to get the train ready as soon as possible. He estimated that it would be ready by 2000 hours. Success or failure now depended on the loyalty and goodwill of the Norwegian railwaymen. As a precaution the engine driver was placed under an armed guard. There was no doubt that the troops, tired as they were, could hold off the enemy; but it was necessary that the withdrawal should not be interfered with as the train ran forward up the valley for about half a mile before turning North to Åndalsnes.

At 2030 hours the train was ready and the troops started to entrain. They were very steady and the whole entraining was quickly carried out covered once more by rear parties whose motor transport was waiting on the road below.

59. The only remaining anxiety was the security of the 300 Norwegian Infantry who had entrained at Lesja. Transport had gone up to Lesjaskog to evacuate them early in the morning, but their subsequent return was not confirmed. The train journey was without further incident and the troops arrived on the quay at Åndalsnes about 2300 hours to embark. They were taken on board H.M.S. "Birmingham," H.M.S. "Manchester," and H.M.S. "Calcutta," while H.M.S. "Auckland" remained for the rear parties who were all on board by 0200 hours.

Åndalsnes had been bombed earlier in the evening but the actual embarkation was carried out unmolested, and once again thanks are due to the Royal Navy for rescuing the Army from a precarious situation as they did twenty-five years ago.

#### COMMENTS.

60. Without being unduly wise after the event it is possible to make certain general comments.