

was then, to hold the Otta position for two or three days, and that he would do his best to cover the Norwegian detachment's withdrawal. The Otta position required two battalions to hold it, and as the Y. and L. would have found difficulty in defending the Sjoa position they were ordered to withdraw on the night 27th/28th to reinforce the Green Howards on the Otta position.

This withdrawal was not as successful as on the previous night. The enemy had anticipated it, and made every effort to work round the flank. Parties of the enemy (dressed as Norwegian troops) succeeded in cutting off some of the forward companies, and eventually only some 12 officers and 300 men were available to assist the Green Howards on the Otta position. Many of 1 Y. and L. who had been thus cut off rejoined subsequently after an adventurous passage of the hills on the flanks of the valley.

43. At about 0500 hours the liaison officer who had taken up the motor transport for the withdrawal of 1 Y. and L. returned to General Paget's headquarters with the news of the difficulties experienced by this battalion. In his opinion the Y. and L. were not in a fit state to hold their sector of the Otta position, which would have to be held solely by the Green Howards.

This situation necessitated some precautionary measures. Movement of troops in the open or on the Lines of Communication by daylight could be justified only as a last resort; but there were still some two and a half hours left before the usual time of arrival of the German morning air reconnaissance. Throughout the operations the enemy was methodical in his air action, and his probable active hours could be forecast with accuracy.

44. The company of the Green Howards in Dombås was, therefore, ordered into a concealment area some two miles to the South of Dombås, with motor transport immediately available for a further forward movement if necessary.

At the same time the K.O.Y.L.I. in Dombås were placed at one hour's notice to move.

While these adjustments were being made, the first news of the intended evacuation reached headquarters. The War Office telegram requested acceptance of a plan or a suggested alternative. General Paget considered he could not answer this without reference to General Ruge, as the evacuation was not possible without his co-operation.

He therefore went to his headquarters and told him frankly the situation, which at the first General Ruge was unable to accept. Finally, he did so, on General Paget's assurance that British troops would cover the withdrawal of the Norwegian Army and would not relinquish Dombås until this had been effected.

45. Meanwhile the situation of the Green Howards and Y. and L. was causing anxiety at the headquarters of the 15th Infantry Brigade. Y. and L. had not recovered from the severe handling they had received during the previous night's withdrawal, and though Green Howards were in good heart they were all too few to cover an extensive position. The enemy had gained contact at 1030 hours, and quickly began a methodical bombardment of the forward troops with artillery and mortars. The bombing and the machine gun fire on the

forward troops were the heaviest experienced up to that time. It was apparent that to hold the position until dark and then extricate the forward battalions might be a matter of considerable difficulty.

46. The time and space problem of the withdrawal had now to be considered. The major factors were:—

(a) The obligation to cover the withdrawal of all Norwegian troops in this area.

(b) The shipping available on the nights 29th/30th April, 30th April/1st May, 1st/2nd May.

(c) The withdrawal would be dependent on one single railway line and one road over a distance of 100 miles.

(d) The physical endurance of the troops.

It was obvious from the start that demolition must play a large part in the plan. A vital point was the bridge over the Rostå gorge between Dovre and Otta. If this was successfully blown, the enemy would be unlikely to get tanks, guns or wheeled vehicles forward of the gorge for at least 48 hours.

One section of the 55 Field Company, R.E., was withdrawn at once from the forward area to prepare the Rostå demolitions, and the company of Green Howards, then in concealment South of Dombås, was sent to cover their preparations.

47. During the afternoon and early evening the Green Howards on the Otta position fought splendidly. One medium and two light tanks were destroyed by the 25 mm. Anti-Tank Company. Other targets included reconnaissance parties and groups of enemy in buildings. There is no doubt that the enemy suffered many casualties in this battle and his subsequent actions showed little desire or ability to press home an attack. It was, however, irritating in the extreme, owing to lack of artillery, to be unable to deal with the German close support guns, which came into action in the open, outside the range of British light machine guns and 3 in. mortars.

At about 1800 hours the K.O.Y.L.I. were ordered to occupy the position South of Dombås, which had been reconnoitred in the morning.

48. The plan for the night withdrawal is worth considering in some detail, because it was the first of a series of precarious operations, where the balance between success and disaster was extremely slender.

Otta is some 25 miles from Dombås, where lay the next secure base occupied by the K.O.Y.L.I. The only means of transport available were the train and a very limited amount of motor transport, both of which had to be wheeled out of the Norwegians. The motor transport was allotted to the rear parties. The train was assembled at Dombås and the motor transport at Dovre, with a staff officer in charge of each. Both started about 2000 hours. The train ran forward to Rudi and the motor transport to Formo, both of which were close behind the front line. At about 2030 hours the fighting slackened on the whole front and the withdrawal started at 2300 hours, the troops falling steadily back on the train and motor transport column.

The train left Rudi about 0230 hours, and the troops detrained into assembly areas at Dombås between 0500 and 0600 hours, where