

would attempt to beach ship to form a lee to try to improve conditions.

Simultaneously with this bad news the Vice-Admiral received a signal from S.N.O. Dunkirk to the effect that Dunkirk was being continuously and heavily bombarded and that the enemy artillery were gradually finding the range of the loading berth. He stated he wished only to enter ships which were necessary for the flow of troops.

This latter signal fortified the Vice-Admiral in his decision to suspend the sailing of personnel vessels to Dunkirk until the accumulation of those en route had been evened out.

55. One group of minesweepers who, up to this time had been working continuous round trips between Sheerness and La Panne, were diverted to round trips between Dunkirk beach and Margate to compensate for the gradual drift of troops westward along the Coast, and to compensate for the reduced flow of troops off Dunkirk Pier consequent on the artillery bombardment. At the same time, by using Margate the duration of the round trip was reduced. The Rear-Admiral, Dover, from off the coast was instructed to run a paddle minesweeper bows ashore on rising tide to be used as a bridge, deeper draught ships coming to her stern, if conditions were suitable. It was not thought, however, that this would be an effective measure of bridging the gap between water-line and off shore ships, as the length of a paddle minesweeper was so small compared with the length of the shallow water to be traversed.

56. During the forenoon beaches at La Panne were subjected to heavy artillery fire. Action was taken with the R.A.F. Commands to locate batteries shelling the beaches and Dunkirk pier and include air bombardment of these positions in the R.A.F. protective measures undertaken during the operation.

57. During the afternoon additional beach parties were sent out, and barges with provisions, ammunition and water arrived at the beaches during the day, and were grounded. Two further drifters were despatched with petrol, diesel oil and lubricants to the beach area to refuel the inshore craft.

58. Arrangements were made to be ready to embark Lord Gort and Staff from La Panne 1800 or later, by M.T.B. After 1700 weather conditions off the beaches improved, particularly as the tide rose and it appeared once more possible to take effective quantities direct from the beaches, and to use the special tows, ships lifeboats, power lifeboats and tugs, which were on passage from Ramsgate and which had been earmarked for lifting the final covering force.

In the afternoon, however, it was learned that the Military plan had been changed, and that it was no longer possible for the original covering position, as planned, to be held by 4,000 troops who were then to withdraw to the beaches for embarkation by boat. Instead, it was learned that the Eastern-most Division was to be withdrawn Westward from the La Panne area, and that the special flight of boats was to be used to lift this force from the beaches. At the same time, the troops in the Bray and Malo sectors were being thinned out by movements Westward towards Dunkirk itself. This change of plan involved concentrating the special tows and the minesweepers—to which they were to transfer the troops—into the stretch opposite

the beach between Bray and one mile East of La Panne and also advancing the commencement of the operation by one hour. The risk of this change of plan was obvious as the boat tows were not in communication with the Vice-Admiral, and reliance had to be placed on the Minesweepers to inform and see that the escorting M.A.S.B.s would shepherd the tows to the new positions. The minesweepers had anchored so as to serve as guiding marks, as had been explained to the Naval Officers in each tow.

Apart from the special tow, a very large number of small power boats despatched, in most cases direct, from the South East ports, Newhaven to Sheerness, were arriving off the beaches, and compensated in a large measure for the heavy losses that had occurred amongst the original towing boats, whalers, cutters, lifeboats and ships' boats, which had occurred on the beaches during the preceding three days.

On the La Panne beaches after 1600 very good progress was made. The piers of pontoons built by the Military the previous day were extremely useful, and were largely responsible for the rapid evacuation of troops. All the troops that could be found were embarked by midnight and ferried off to the ships. The local Beachmaster (Captain R. Pim, R.N.V.R.) searched the adjacent beaches for stragglers at midnight, and was informed by a Staff Officer that no more troops would embark from the La Panne beaches, but would march to Dunkirk, as it was anticipated that these beaches would be shelled and probably be in German hands the following day. This, as it turned out, was a correct forecast. The Beachmaster estimates that 5,000 men were lifted from the La Panne beaches during the evening and up to midnight.

59. At 1920 all ships in the fleets were informed by the Vice-Admiral that the final evacuation of the B.E.F. was expected on the night 1st/2nd June, and that the evacuation of the French from Dunkirk and Malo beach would continue from 1st June by both British and French ships.

60. General Lloyd informed the D.M.O. of the new plan, stating that General Alexander had been placed in command of the final phase of the evacuation. Composition of force not known. Further, that it was impossible now to say how long the French evacuation would take but that the Alexander force would remain till the last. No firm information could be obtained from the French as regards:—

(i) The number of French troops to be evacuated.

(ii) The nature and extent of French sea-borne transport.

(iii) The French military plan for the defence of the perimeter and the final withdrawal of French troops.

61. *General Remarks:* The main features of the day were:—

(a) The increased enemy artillery activity on Dunkirk and La Panne beach, and on the approach channels.

(b) The set-back to evacuation from the beaches that occurred during the choppy weather of the forenoon, followed by an excellent recovery in the afternoon and evening when large numbers were lifted from the beaches.

(c) The change in the military plan as regards the locality and time of lifting the final contingents of the B.E.F.