



SUPPLEMENT

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War Office,
March, 1941.

The following Despatches have been received by the Secretary of State for War from General the Viscount GORT, V.C., K.C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.V.O., M.C., Commander-in-Chief, British Expeditionary Force. (France and Belgium 1939-40.)

FIRST DESPATCH

(Covering the period from 3rd September, 1939, to 31st January, 1940).

General Headquarters;
British Expeditionary Force,
25th April, 1940.

Sir,

1. I have the honour to submit a report on the employment of the British Expeditionary Force in France from 3rd September, 1939, the date I assumed command, until 31st January, 1940.

2. The move of the Force to France began as a whole on 10th September, although small advanced parties and technical personnel had been arriving since 4th September. The success of the initial operation was due primarily to the many detailed and complex plans carefully prepared under conditions of absolute secrecy in peace time. The perfection of these plans, the ready co-operation of the Board of Trade, the complete arrangements made by the Admiralty for the safety of ships while at sea, and the willing help of the French Naval, Military, and Civil authorities all combined to ensure the successful landing of the British Troops in France.

3. The plans for the despatch of the Force differed in two important respects from those of August, 1914.

The possibility of attack by sea and air made it necessary to use the Western ports of France instead of the Channel ports, while the total replacement of animals by mechanical vehicles, which had been completed by 1939, presented a new problem in transportation.

The troops were landed at Cherbourg and their stores and vehicles were despatched to Nantes, St. Nazaire, and Brest.

This plan entailed the early despatch of staff with the proper complement of units of the Docks and other Transportation Services. The personnel of these Services were in the main recruited from the Port Authorities in Great Britain at the outbreak of war.

These units were operating to full capacity the berths allotted to the Force, within forty-eight hours of landing, and the programme was carried out according to the time table throughout the whole period of the disembarkation of 1st and 2nd Corps. This I regard as a feat deserving of the highest praise.