

On return from the meeting, orders were issued to implement these decisions, and that evening I moved my command post to the Château de Premesques, midway between Armentières and Lille.

*The final severance of the L. of C. and the investment of Boulogne.*

36. During the 21st May the enemy penetration into the rearward areas increased and communication across the Somme was finally severed. Since the 17th May the Commander of the Lines of Communication Area (Major-General P. de Fonblanque) had been taking energetic steps for its defence, in so far as it was possible with the few and scattered troops available.

These consisted, apart from Armoured Division and 51st Division now returning from the Saar, of those portions of 12th and 46th Divisions (some nine battalions in all) which could not be despatched forward, three unbrigaded infantry battalions and the contents of the reinforcement depôts, together with troops of the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps and of the administrative services.

On 23rd May, however, the War Office appointed Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Karslake to command the defences on the Lines of Communication and I was not concerned in the operations which ensued. Nevertheless, I did not immediately abandon hope of the Armoured Division breaking through, and I urged the War Office to use their best endeavours to this end and to prevent its being used piecemeal in local operations at the request of the French Command.

At about 3.30 p.m. on the 21st May, I received information that an enemy column of all arms was approaching Boulogne. The rear element of G.H.Q., consisting largely of the Adjutant-General's Branch and of headquarters of Services, which had been sent to that town on 17th and 18th May, had been moved to Wimereux on 20th May as a result of enemy bombing.

All possible steps had been taken to put Boulogne in a state of defence with the troops available, consisting of labour units and the personnel of rest camps. On 19th May, an endeavour was made to bring up troops from beyond the Somme, to hold the line of the Canche; but the time for this was past and the troops could not get beyond Abbeville. The hospitals in the Etaples area were now evacuated, and on 21st May a party of Engineers, supervised by my Director of Works, Brigadier W. Cave-Browne, demolished most of the bridges over the Canche.

As soon as the news of this new threat was received, the War Office was asked for bomber support, which was at once forthcoming. Enemy tanks were located and bombed at Hesdin and Fruges, but no good targets were obtained on the coast road. The War Office was also asked to send a detachment of Royal Marines for the defence of Boulogne but had already done so. Early on the 22nd May, 20th Guards Brigade (Brigadier W. A. F. L. Fox-Pitt) of two battalions with an anti-tank battery landed, thus establishing the defence of the town and enabling those troops who were not required for the defence to be evacuated in good order.

By the evening of 22nd May, the enemy armoured forces were within nine miles of Calais. Boulogne was now isolated and its final

evacuation was carried out under the orders of the War Office, being completed on the night of 23/24th May.

*The Administrative Situation.*

37. During the whole of this period I had been kept in the closest touch with the administrative situation by the Quarter-Master-General (Lieutenant-General W. G. Lindsell). Up to 16th May the administrative arrangements which formed part of Plan D had worked well, and although enemy air action steadily intensified during the period, there was no serious interference with the maintenance of the force.

On 17th May, however, the Quarter-Master-General decided, in view of the situation south of Arras, to discontinue the use of the railway from the regulating station at Abancourt via Amiens and Arras, and to switch all traffic via Eu and Abbeville to Béthune. He also ordered forward every available trainload of ammunition to the Hazebrouck area.

On 19th May, directly after the C.G.S. had spoken to the War Office as to the possibility of enforced withdrawal, the Q.M.G. telephoned to the War Office to discuss the opening of new bases. On the same day, one of his staff officers left for London to arrange an emergency shipment programme for supplies and stores to the ports of Boulogne, Calais and Dunkirk. It was to prove none too soon, for the railway at Abbeville was cut on 21st May. A new plan had to be put into operation at once for the maintenance of the force north of the Somme, estimated at 250,000 men and requiring a daily lift of ammunition, supplies and petrol, of some 2,000 tons.

The petrol situation, fortunately, gave no cause for concern since, although the dumps forward of the Somme had been destroyed on evacuation, together with a large civil storage plant near Douai, there still remained a large army bulk filling station near Lille.

The supply situation was however, bad, and on 21st May, Corps had only three days R.A.S.C. supplies in the forward area. Matters might, at any time, have become serious had it not been for the success of the measures taken between 23rd and 26th May, to organise the supplies in Lille belonging to the Expeditionary Force Institutes and to civilian firms.

The decision to maintain the force through the northern ports was finally taken on 21st May and the headquarters of a Base Sub-Area established at Dunkirk, together with a section of Q.M.G.'s staff, in close touch with the British and French Naval authorities.

Rail communication in the area was by now precarious, and plans were worked out on the basis of establishing dumps, one in each Corps area, which could be wholly maintained by road. The position was, by this time, greatly complicated by the numbers of improvised forces which the quickly changing situation had made necessary: most of these, like the three divisions for pioneer duties, had no proper administrative echelons. Some were within reach of Corps, but others were not and these had to be dependent on fortuitous sources of supply, or else live for a time on the country.

The situation had grown even worse by 22nd May, when the ports at both Boulogne and Calais were out of action, and the greater part of the Railhead Mechanical Transport Companies had been captured. Furthermore a reconnaissance of Ostend had shewn that the