

arrived from the War Office that night. He brought with him a list showing the order of priority for shipment of stores, etc., and a suggested outline plan for evacuation. A Senior Naval Officer also arrived early next morning.

15th June.

12. At 0315 hours Lieutenant-General J. H. Marshall-Cornwall reported to me, and we discussed the situation. I placed all British troops with the Tenth French Army under his command, and gave him orders to co-operate with that Army until an opportunity arose to disengage his troops and withdraw them to Cherbourg for embarkation to the United Kingdom.

The subsequent operations of Lieutenant-General J. H. Marshall-Cornwall's troops (Norman Force*) are described in that officer's report which is attached at Appendix "B".

13. The withdrawal of B.E.F. started in the early hours of 15th June. The flights of the Canadian Division which had arrived in the Concentration Area were sent back to Brest for embarkation, corps troops were re-embarked at St. Malo, and various L. of C. troops in the Le Mans area were moved nearer the port areas.

14. Information as to the position of the enemy on the front of the Tenth French Army and southwards was very meagre as bad visibility prevented air reconnaissance, and there were no ground troops to reconnoitre between Alençon and Tours.

The general inference, however, was that there was little enemy activity west of Rouen, but hostile infantry were engaging the 157th Infantry Brigade in the area of Conches.

A British pilot of a Bomber aircraft, who had made a forced landing, reported that he had run into heavy anti-aircraft fire about Evreux and that he had seen a column of all arms moving south in that area. This report seemed to confirm previous information that the Fourth German Army was moving South with its left on Chartres.

15. At 0810 hours I considered that my position at Le Mans was too exposed, since there was no known body of troops covering that area. I therefore moved my Headquarters back to Vitre, just west of Laval. I took with me the G.O.C. L. of C. Area, a part of whose staff I had amalgamated with my own since I was entirely dependent on L. of C. Signals for my communications. My own staff consisted only of four officers and two clerks, the remainder having been stopped at St. Malo and sent back to England.

16. At 1230 hours the C.I.G.S. telephoned to say that the Prime Minister was anxious about the withdrawal of the 52nd Division (less the detachment with Tenth French Army). The Prime Minister wished the embarkation to be cancelled, as he feared the effect of such a withdrawal on the morale of the French.

I pointed out that my plans had already received approval, that orders had been issued for the move, and that any alterations now would complicate the embarkation at Cherbourg

and might well endanger it. The C.I.G.S., however, said that the Prime Minister did not wish the division to be embarked without the approval of His Majesty's Government.

17. At this time the complete absence of any information of the whereabouts of the enemy on the Le Mans front caused me some anxiety, as any penetration of enemy troops towards Laval and Rennes would have seriously endangered the safety of the B.E.F.

18. I spoke again to the C.I.G.S. at 2150 hours. I explained to him the situation as I knew it, and I once more impressed on him the need to evacuate 52nd Division (less the detachment with Tenth French Army). The necessary shipping was available at Cherbourg and was being kept idle. The air situation was also at that time favourable.

An hour and a half later the C.I.G.S. gave permission to embark one field regiment, one field company and other details of 52nd Division which were not needed to support the infantry of the Division. Orders implementing these instructions were at once issued.

19. Later that night another battalion and a troop of anti-tank guns from 52nd Division were put under General Marshall-Cornwall's orders for the protection of the Cherbourg peninsula at St. Sauveur.

No information of the enemy's movements could be obtained, but he did not appear at the moment to have exploited the gap at Le Mans.

20. During the preceding 24 hours just over 12,000 troops were reported to have been evacuated from the different ports.

16th June.

21. At 0700 hours the C.I.G.S. rang me up and said that all arrangements could be made for the evacuation of 52nd Division (less the detachment with Tenth French Army), but that no actual movement was yet to take place. At 0830 hours, however, he rang up again and confirmed that 52nd Division (less the detachment with Tenth French Army) could now begin to embark: Norman Force itself was to continue to co-operate with the Tenth French Army. I then asked the C.I.G.S. what the policy should be with regard to troops of the French Army who might wish to embark at Cherbourg. He informed me that they would be allowed to do so. Orders for the embarkation of 52nd Division (less the detachment with the Tenth French Army) were issued.

I issued orders to G.O.C. L. of C. to the effect that work of re-embarkation of personnel, stores, and vehicles was to continue at all ports as long as the tactical situation permitted.

22. Owing, once more, to poor visibility no air reconnaissance was possible, but reports from Motor Contact Officers and from Norman Force showed that the enemy was in contact with the Tenth French Army along its front but that he was attacking seriously only against 157th Infantry Brigade. Further to the South enemy movement seemed to be directed on Chartres.

Information was received later from captured orders which showed that the Fourth German Army was to attack that day with the ultimate object of gaining Cherbourg and Brest.

23. The C.I.G.S. telephoned at 1325 hours to confirm that 52nd Division (less the detachment with Tenth French Army) could now embark. He said that he was still unable to give

* Norman Force was an improvised formation which, on 15th June, comprised:—

3rd Armoured Brigade.

157th Brigade Group (157th Infantry Brigade; 71st Field Regiment R.A.; Troop-Carrying Company, 52nd Division).

Beauman Division (see Footnote page 1).