

at the time they had nothing available save the 68th Division and the regional troops, they did not demur.

However, so far as I am aware, no action was ever taken in this respect.

*Description of the Dunkirk Perimeter.*

48. The British sector of the Dunkirk perimeter had its right at Bergues, and thence followed the canals to Furnes and Nieuport. These places were old-fashioned fortified towns, easy to defend but affording good bombing targets. The destruction of the bridges presented no difficulty, and all were in fact blown in time by British or French troops except that at Nieuport which was wide and solid, and could not be demolished before the arrival of the enemy. Two natural switch lines were available: the canal from Bergues to Dunkirk and the Canal des Moeres from Dunkirk south-east towards Hondschoote.

Immediately north of this line came the inundations, extending from Bergues over the district of the Moeres to a width varying from one to three miles. Except in a few places, they did not cover the roads but were designed to leave them clear, while preventing deployment. They did, however, sometimes prevent troops from digging themselves in. On the Belgian side of the frontier the order to begin the inundations was not given by Belgian G.Q.G. till the morning of 26th May and they never became effective.

To the north of the inundations was more low-lying land; then came the Bergues-Furnes Canal, and the main lateral road from Furnes to Dunkirk. Finally there was the narrow strip of dunes giving way to a wide, open beach running the whole length of the position and shelving very slowly to the sea. There were no quays or piers whatever except those at Dunkirk itself. At intervals of about a mile along the shore lay the seaside resorts of Coxyde, La Panne, Bray Dunes and Malo-les-Bains.

*Layout of the Sector and Problem of Traffic Control.*

49. Sir Ronald Adam, on leaving Cassel, went at once to the headquarters of the 48th Division at Bergues to find out the latest situation and in particular what troops were immediately available either to hold the perimeter or to control the traffic. He learnt that the enemy were advancing north eastwards from the Forest of Clairmarais: there could therefore be no question of using any of the reserves of 48th Division, and the only troops immediately available were certain engineer units. General Thorne, however, lent his C.R.A. (Brigadier Hon. E. F. Lawson) who was instructed to lay out the defence of the perimeter, and to use for the purpose such troops as were on the spot, or were entering the perimeter.

The position was then divided into three Corps areas, each including a collecting area outside the perimeter, a sector of the canal line and a sector of the beach.

Already it was seen that the traffic problem was going to assume formidable proportions. Ever since the 10th May it had been a potential source of trouble, but it had been kept in hand in the early stages by strict adherence to pre-arranged plans and by the use of infantry for traffic control. Once the withdrawal from the Dyle began, the problem became acute in France as well as in Belgium. Refugees began to leave

their homes in northern France before the French Government put into operation the plans they had made. The French organisations were not available and no British troops could be spared to control the traffic. The refugee problem had therefore become increasingly acute, and the tide which at first set westwards from Belgium had now met the enemy again in the Somme area and had begun to turn back on itself. Scenes of misery were everywhere, and the distress of women, children and aged people was pitiable. Fortunately the fine weather and warm nights mitigated their plight to some degree and though the outbreak of famine was expected at any moment it did not actually occur in the area of the B.E.F. Little, unfortunately, could be done to help the refugees, since supplies for the troops were still seriously short. Moreover their presence on the roads was often a grave menace to our movement. It had been necessary to give Corps a free hand in handling them: on occasions it had been necessary to turn vehicles into the fields in order to keep the roads clear.

During the 27th May, troops and their transport began to withdraw into the perimeter on the fronts of all three Corps; and where the troops had received the necessary orders, vehicles were disabled and abandoned in the assembly areas. The few troops who could be spared for traffic control did not, however, prove sufficient for the purpose, and consequently a great number of British and French vehicles entered the perimeter and the town of Dunkirk when they should have remained outside. There was inevitably a large number of vehicles which had become detached from their units, and a number of cases also occurred that day in which units became separated from their formations and arrived within the perimeter without sufficiently clear orders. These were sent to reinforce the defence of the perimeter, or embarked, as seemed best to those in control.

Next day (28th May) when Corps started to take charge in their areas, the difficulties with the British traffic were cleared up, only to be replaced by difficulties with the French traffic.

The French 60th Division began to arrive from Belgium, and at the same time rearward elements of their light mechanised divisions appeared from the south-east and south. These were soon followed by the transport of the French 3rd Corps, mainly horsed. None of these appeared to have received orders to leave their transport outside the perimeter: seldom did they do so unless compelled by British traffic control posts.

By the 28th, Brigadier Lawson, using the greatest energy, had succeeded in the urgent task of manning the perimeter from Bergues to Nieuport with troops from a number of units, chiefly artillery.

50. The Admiralty had placed the naval arrangements for embarkation in the hands of the Dover Command. A Senior Naval Officer had been sent to Dunkirk to work out detailed plans, and steps had been taken to collect a large number of small ships, and of boats for taking troops from the beach out to the ships.

On 27th May, however, these arrangements had not had time to take effect, nor had it yet been possible to provide sufficient naval ratings to man the beaches. Yet a start was made;