

4. On landing the fighting troops were passed rapidly through transit camps and their vehicles were cleared at once to Vehicle Marshalling Parks, whence they were despatched in convoys, while troops left by rail on the same day as they landed.

Since the troops and their vehicles were landed at different ports they had to be collected in an assembly area which had been chosen in the vicinity of Le Mans and Laval. The assembling of troops by rail and vehicles by road took about six days. The resource of individual drivers was tested by changes of programme, inevitable in an operation of this kind, by the damage which some vehicles had sustained during the sea passage and by mechanical failures. Drivers and vehicles were on the road for long periods, but their duty was lightened by the hospitality of the French inhabitants, which all ranks will recall with gratitude.

5. On 13th September I moved my headquarters from the War Office to Camberley, where General Headquarters was forming. On the following day, accompanied by Lieutenant-General (now General) Sir John Dill, Commander of 1st Corps, and by my personal staff, I embarked in H.M.S. "Skate," and, landing at Cherbourg, left by motor car for the Château de la Blanchardière, Le Mans, which the French Government had kindly placed at my disposal.

6. On 21st September the concentration of the General Headquarters Staff and of the essential Lines of Communication units was complete. The next day the advanced elements of 1st Corps and of General Headquarters Troops arrived, the former moving to an area around Laval and the latter to an area around Le Mans. Units were given a minimum of one week in which to assemble and reorganise and although some of the units of 1st Corps were still incomplete, the limited accommodation available in the assembly area made it essential to begin the move forward before 26th September when the leading units of 2nd Corps were due to arrive.

7. During these early weeks the maintenance of the Force presented a problem which called for the greatest resource and initiative on the part of my Quarter-Master-General, Lieutenant-General W. G. Lindsell, his Staff and Services.

In the units of the Royal Army Service Corps were many officers and men fresh from civil life who were constantly called upon to surmount unforeseen difficulties. By their unflinching energy and the assistance of the French authorities the Force was maintained without any failure of supplies. It should be added that with the exception of eleven regular officers, the personnel of the Movement Control organisation was built up from Supplementary Reserve officers and men.

The administrative staff were obliged to deal with the day-to-day work of landing troops, their vehicles and current supplies, and to undertake the equally important task of building up reserves of ammunition, supplies, and ordnance stores. Covered accommodation was difficult to obtain and temporary dumps of non-perishable stores had to be established wherever the necessary space could be found in the vicinity of the ports of entry.

8. In these early days the Staff met for the first time the problem arising from the wide dispersion imposed by the necessity to guard against air attack.

The towns of Le Mans and Laval were fifty miles apart, and the base ports were on an average one hundred and fifty miles from the assembly area. Helpful though the French authorities were, the unfamiliar conditions made telephone communication difficult, apart from the danger of breach of security which it entailed. Since many despatch riders spoke no French it was often found that control could only be properly maintained by personal visits; Commanders and their staffs were therefore forced to spend many hours on the road.

The dispersion dictated by the possibility of aerial bombardment greatly increases demands upon signal communications and transport and thus lengthens the time which must elapse between the issue of orders and their execution.

The Move to the Belgian Frontier.

9. On 22nd September, I left Le Mans for Amiens. Arriving at Mantes-sur-Seine, I was handed a telegram from General Georges, Commander of the French Front of the North-East, which read as follows:—

"Pour Général Commandant, B.E.F.

"Limite envisagée prévoit front de B.E.F. droite à MAULDE gauche à MENIN ou gauche à AUTRYCHE - SUR - ESCAUT. Général GEORGES désirerait avoir accord 22 Septembre."

In the meantime, however, General Gamelin had proceeded to London to discuss with His Majesty's Government the frontage which was to be held by the British Expeditionary Force.

After I had made a reconnaissance on 24th and 25th September of the sector which it was proposed to allot to the British Expeditionary Force I visited General Georges at Grand Quartier General on 26th September, in the company of my Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant-General H. R. Pownall. I then agreed to accept the sector offered by General Georges to the British Expeditionary Force. This sector was from Maulde exclusive to Halluin inclusive, and thence a defensive flank along river Lys/Armentières. General Georges placed 51st French Division (Général de Brigade Gillard) under my command, and I decided to employ it in my left sector, covering the towns of Roubaix and Tourcoing.

10. It had been originally intended that formations, as soon as they had completed their reorganisation in the assembly area, should move to a concentration area in the North of France, and remain there in readiness to occupy the line not earlier than 5th October. General Georges decided, however, that it was inadvisable to await the arrival of the whole British Expeditionary Force in the concentration area and expressed a wish that 1st Corps should move without delay into the sector north of Maulde. I accordingly informed General Georges that 1st Corps would take over its sector on 3rd October and that 2nd Corps would be able to go into the line about 12th October.

1st Corps began the two hundred and fifty-mile move from the assembly area on 26th September.

Tanks, tracked vehicles, and slow moving artillery proceeded by train and the remainder of the force advanced on three parallel routes.

Three days were allotted for the move of each formation. Two staging areas were arranged on each road, south of the rivers Seine and Somme respectively, and anti-aircraft defence