

declared an open town and that British troop movements would prejudice its safety, but no adequate alternative routes to the Dyle were available and I was therefore compelled to adhere to the original plan of using the outskirts of the city.

The 3rd Division, on arrival, reported that a Belgian division was holding the bridgehead at Louvain, although I had assumed that this should be a British responsibility. 2nd Corps therefore took up a narrow front on their right with a strong reserve in rear of Louvain.

5th Division, which was training in the area south-west of Amiens, was ordered to proceed by march route so as to shorten the move by motor transport in a later phase, and later occupied a position on the Senne.

The news from the Belgian army, of which King Leopold had assumed command on the outbreak of war, was not good. Belgian cyclist troops from east of the Meuse were falling back on Huy. At Maastricht, it was reported that they had been forestalled by enemy action from the rear and had been unable to demolish important bridges over the Albert Canal and the Meuse across which the enemy had begun to move. Air bombing was requested and was extremely effective, but could not altogether deny the passage of the water obstacles to the enemy. On my right the French Cavalry Corps had reached their position on the line Huy—Hannut—Tirlemont and reconnoitred the Belgian anti-tank obstacle. They reported that, as I had supposed, there was no effective obstacle on the Gembloux line and that the obstacle on the Perwez line was not only unfinished but badly sited on a forward slope. I thereupon conveyed to General Georges a confirmation of my objections to pushing forward so as to make use of the obstacle in its unfinished state, notwithstanding the Belgians' anxiety that I should do so. Later that day I was informed that he had decided that the main line of resistance was to be on the Gembloux line as planned, but that the French were to push out advanced troops to the line of the obstacle. He expressed the hope that the B.E.F. would conform, and 1st and 2nd Corps accordingly reconnoitred the anti-tank obstacles reported to exist round the forest of Meerdael with a view to pushing forward detachments with anti-tank guns. They found them complete only in places.

20. The first phase of Plan D was successfully completed by 12th May, and the French 1st Army on my right then accelerated the programme governing their forward movement by moving by day as well as by night. The enemy progress across the Albert Canal had up to now been relatively small, due to a successful counter-attack by the French Cavalry Corps at St. Trond, but larger concentrations were now reported north of the Albert Canal. Disquieting news was received from the Ardennes, where a German thrust was reported as developing on the front of the French 9th Army, with at least two armoured divisions.

On this date I requested the War Office to expedite the despatch of the 1st Armoured Division to the greatest extent possible. I also asked that they should be shipped to the nearest available port and loaded tactically with a view to operations as soon as possible after landing.

The day was one of great activity in the air, and afforded great opportunities for the Royal

Air Force to impede the enemy advance; but such opportunities were of a fleeting character, since the enemy established strong anti-aircraft defences soon after his arrival, particularly in towns at which roads converged. Tactical reconnaissance became virtually impossible without fighter support, and the demands made on the fighter group of the Air Component were extremely heavy. They had been met with unfailing skill and courage, and with marked success, but by now the group was reduced to some 50 aircraft, and although I had asked for four fresh squadrons from home, only one had arrived. In three days' operations, the British Air Force in France had firm reports of the destruction of 101 enemy aircraft, mostly fighters, against a loss of 78 of our own.

That afternoon a conference was held at the Château Casteau, near Mons which was attended by the King of the Belgians, General Van Overstraeten, M. Daladier, Generals Georges and Billotte, and my Chief of the General Staff (Lieutenant-General H. R. Pownall), as my representative in my absence. The primary object of the conference was to achieve some measure of co-ordination in the Belgian theatre of war. General Billotte's command included the French 1st and 7th Armies, between which lay the Belgian Army under the independent command of their King, and the B.E.F. which, though under the command of General Georges, was not under that of General Billotte. Whatever the nature of the operations, a common doctrine was clearly necessary and when General Georges enquired if the King of the Belgians and I would be prepared to accept co-ordination by General Billotte as his representative, General Pownall said he was sure that I would agree. The King of the Belgians likewise agreed.

21. On 13th May I moved my Command Post forward to Renaix; no event of major importance occurred during the day, but some small infantry attacks developed on the British sector. These were easily held. Movements of the main bodies of the French 1st and 7th Armies continued in accordance with their plans, and units of the latter were by now north of Antwerp on the Dutch border. It was, however, becoming increasingly evident that they would be unable to prevent the enemy occupation of Walcheren and Zuid Beveland which was developing from the north-east.

During the day and the following night the Belgian forces were in process of withdrawing their northern forces to the general line Louvain—Antwerp, and the Staff of the Belgian G.Q.G. expressed concern lest the simultaneous withdrawal of their Cavalry Corps and that of the French, north-west and south-west from their junction point at Tirlemont, would create a gap. There appeared to me to be little danger, but nevertheless I ordered 12th Lancers to watch the situation, assisted if need be by divisional cavalry regiments.

22. On 14th May I went to Brussels, where at 12 noon I met the Commanders of 1st and 2nd Corps at the British Embassy. The Commander of 2nd Corps reported that the Belgian 1st Corps was now reforming in 4th Division area. I also discussed the organisation of the second position on the Senne canal and of a Corps reserve line east of Brussels. 5th and 48th Divisions were ordered to reconnoitre the Senne position on 15th May. That afternoon at 3 p.m.