

41. Meantime the Vice Admiral, Dover, had been much exercised regarding the possibility of the continued use of Dunkirk Harbour for personnel vessels and was anxiously awaiting the report from VANQUISHER, who had been sent to investigate the reported obstruction. VANQUISHER'S report was received at 0610 stating entrance was practicable but that obstruction exists towards outer inside end of the Eastern Arm. Pending amplifying reports, the sailing of personnel vessels to Dunkirk was resumed, although at this time there were still 4 personnel vessels presumed to be in the vicinity of Dunkirk Harbour, whose movements and whereabouts throughout the night still remained obscure.

The Vice Admiral asked R.A. Dover, who was in HEBE, whether personnel ships could, in fact, still use Dunkirk. In the meantime a series of signals from Rear Admiral, Dover, and destroyers off the coast, were received, stating that the beaches were filling up rapidly and more ships and boats were urgently required there. Although it was known that the destroyers could use Dunkirk, it appeared at this time that the best division of transport was to send the great majority of destroyers to the beaches, where urgent demands could not be ignored, and the personnel vessels to Dunkirk Harbour, only an occasional destroyer being sent to Dunkirk from the reduced number now available for the operation.

42. At Dunkirk there were no air attacks in the early morning and all was quiet. Later, when ships began to arrive in quantity, in view of the massive target presented by a number of ships alongside the East Pier at a time, the S.N.O. Dunkirk ordered destroyers alongside only one at a time. At about 0800 a store ship arrived at Dunkirk with provisions but no water. This caused so much congestion on the pier that unloading was abandoned when half complete, and the store ship filled with troops. A certain amount of water was obtained from destroyers.

43. During the forenoon the Military constructed a long pier of lorries with deck planking, into the sea off Bray. This was an excellent piece of work, but was insufficiently stable for use by such craft as paddle steamers, nor even smaller power craft in a loup. It was invaluable later for embarking troops into small boats. As regards general embarkation off the beaches, it was later learnt that it was a common occurrence for processions of small boats loaded with troops to be cast adrift when empty and allowed to float away to seaward, owing to the lack of sufficient naval ratings as boat-keepers. For the same reason many of the smaller pulling boats were swamped and sunk due to overloading by uncontrolled "rush" of soldiers. Both these faults were remedied later.

44. Matters proceeded smoothly throughout the day owing to the mist and there being a big smoke cloud over Dunkirk which prevented the enemy bombers attacking the ships in large numbers.

In order to increase the rate of embarkation through the bottleneck of the East Pier gangway, the troops were urged to quicken their pace and eventually thousands of troops, tired and without food and water for days, broke into the double and kept it up the whole length of the pier for more than two hours.

45. The attempt to maintain an adequate rate of lift using only the older destroyers was by now shown to be impracticable. The destroyers were lifting about 17,000 personnel vessels about 9,500 in the 24 hours. Remaining vessels were estimated to be worth about 15,000 per day. This gave a total lift of about 43,000 per day. The situation called for a lift of at least 55,000 per day. Verbal representations being made to the 1st Sea Lord, authority was received for the return to the Dover Command of the modern destroyers released the night before.

Accordingly Commander-in-Chief, Nore, at 1531 gave orders to HARVESTER, HAVANT, IVANHOE, IMPULSIVE, ICARUS and INTREPID to proceed at once to Dunkirk. Subsequently some of these destroyers were diverted to the beaches.

46. *Arrangements for the final evacuation of the Rearguard of the B.E.F.* During the forenoon representatives of the Commander-in-Chief of the B.E.F. and staff attended a conference with the Vice Admiral.

The Military officers explained the Commander-in-Chief's plan and gave daylight on Saturday, 1st June, as the latest reasonable date up to which the B.E.F. might be expected to hold the eastern perimeter, the size of the corresponding force being about 4,000.

By that date and time the Vice Admiral knew that he should be in possession of ocean-going tugs, ships' lifeboats and ships' power lifeboats which he could specially reserve for the climax of this critical operation. Accordingly, agreement was reached on the following:—

(a) That evacuation should proceed with the utmost vigour to ensure that by 0130 on 1st June, the British Forces ashore should have been reduced to the rear guard of 4,000.

(b) That special boats and tugs should be accumulated and held aside to ensure them being available in the early hours of 1st June.

(c) That the plan should provide for lifting a rear guard of 4,000, plus R.N. beach parties, in one or more flights between 0130 and 0300 on the 1st June.

(d) Final decision based on the progress of the evacuation of the main body to be made by the Vice Admiral at 1400 on Friday, 31st May, as to the possibility of adhering to the plan.

Other technical details were settled at the meeting and the Military staff were given the assurance that the ever increasing rate of lifting showed every promise of enabling an affirmative decision to be given at the critical hour of 1400/31st May. After the conference the Military officers communicated the plan both to the War Office and the Commander-in-Chief, B.E.F.

47. *Remarks.* The organisation of traffic to and from the beaches was recovering from the setback it had received when all resources had to be thrown upon the beaches and Dunkirk Harbour when the outflanking and forcing back of the B.E.F. was thought to be imminent consequent upon the surrender of the Belgian forces. Furthermore, a number of organised, and freelance groups of small power boats, were commencing to arrive off the coast, who, by seizing the abandoned and drifting pulling boats, were able to do much to increase the rate of lifting from the beaches.