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OPERATIONS IN CENTRAL NORWAY, 1940.

PREFACE BY THE WAR OFFICE.

Of the two expeditions which the United Kingdom and France sent to Norway in April, 1940, one to Northern Norway and one to Central Norway, the following despatch covers the latter from the beginning of operations.

In Central Norway two main landings were made, one in the Namsos area by a force under the command of Major-General A. Carton de Wiart, V.C., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., and one in the Åndalsnes area by a force under the command, first of Brigadier H. de R. Morgan, D.S.O., and later of Major-General B. C. T. Paget, D.S.O., M.C. On 19th April, 1940, Lieutenant-General H. R. S. Massy, D.S.O., M.C., was instructed to assume the appointment of Commander-in-Chief of the forces operating in Central Norway. He exercised this command from his Headquarters in the United Kingdom as the course of events did not permit the opening of a Headquarters in Norway.

When the decision to withdraw from Central Norway was taken on 27th April, 1940, it was agreed to press on with operations against Narvik, and the force in Northern Norway comprising British, French and Polish troops succeeded in capturing the town of Narvik before it, in turn, had to be withdrawn at the beginning of June, 1940.

The following despatch was submitted to the Secretary of State for War on 13th May, 1940 by Lieutenant-General H. R. S. MASSY, D.S.O., M.C., Commander-in-Chief, North Western Expeditionary Force.

I have the honour to submit my report on the operations in Central Norway, up to and

including 3rd May. This report is divided into four Parts as under:—

- PART I.—General Summary of Events.
- PART II.—Operations in the Namsos area.
- PART III.—Operations in the Åndalsnes area.
- PART IV.—Conclusions and lessons.

I am indebted for Part II of this report to Major-General Carton de Wiart and for Part III to Major-General B. C. T. Paget and Brigadier H. de R. Morgan, who have provided me with the necessary material for them.

PART I.

GENERAL SUMMARY OF EVENTS.

1. When the original plan for operations in Southern Norway was made, the landings at Åndalsnes and Namsos were intended as diversions to a main attack to be made on Trondheim. When the landings at Åndalsnes and Namsos were effected without loss, and our troops advanced inland from these bases, it was decided that Trondheim might be captured by a converging movement instead of by a hazardous direct attack from seaward.

It was hoped too that sufficient troops could be put into Åndalsnes to stiffen Norwegian resistance in the South, and thus put a limit to the German advance from Oslo.

It was against this background that I was instructed on 19th April to assume the appointment of Commander of the North-Western Expeditionary Force and to form my Headquarters with a view to taking command as soon as possible of the operations in progress North and South of Trondheim.

My instructions, as I understood them, were to capture Trondheim, and I decided that the first step towards this end must be to stop the German advance from Oslo, and then to plan a deliberate combined operation for the capture of Trondheim itself.

I record below a narrative of the operations which took place and the various decisions arrived at as the turn of events required. I have purposely kept this report as short as possible, fuller details on subjects which may require consideration will be forwarded separately to the War Office.

2. In accordance with my instructions I assumed direct control of operations on 22nd April. In view of the fact that my Headquarters were still in the process of forming and were not in a position to operate as such, orders were issued by my Staff in collaboration with the Staff of the War Office. This unusual and difficult position was made workable by the co-operation and assistance not only of the Military Operations Directorate but also of the numerous War Office branches which were necessarily consulted and whose aid was invoked during the period of operations.

Briefly, the situation in Southern Norway when I assumed command was as follows:—

In the area South of Trondheim Brigadier H. de R. Morgan with the 148th Infantry Brigade (1/5 Leicesters and 8 Foresters) was in the Lillehammer area South of Dombås in touch with Norwegian troops. The ship carrying Brigadier Morgan's first-line transport had been sunk. He was therefore bereft of essential fighting equipment, including anti-tank guns. In the Namsos area, North of Trondheim Major-General Carton de Wiart had under his command Brigadier C. G. Phillips' 146th Infantry Brigade (4 Lincolns, 1/4 K.O.Y.L.I., and Hallams) and one demi-brigade of Chasseurs Alpins commanded by General Audet. The 146th Infantry Brigade was in contact with German forces near Verdalen, 45 miles North-East of Trondheim. The Chasseurs Alpins were in the vicinity of Namsos.

Major-General B. C. T. Paget had been selected to command the British forces operating South of Trondheim, and on this day he was handed my instructions, a copy of which is attached to this report at Appendix "A." Accompanying him to assume control of the Base Area of Åndalsnes and to make a plan for its development as a base were Brigadier D. McA. Hogg, D.A. and Q.M.G. of Force Headquarters, and Brigadier D. J. R. Richards as Air Defence Commander to plan the air defence of the Base Area.

During this day news was received that the 146th Infantry Brigade had been attacked on the previous day, the 21st April, by enemy landed from a cruiser and destroyers, and that Steinkjer had been heavily bombed. The base at Namsos was now being regularly bombed and General Carton de Wiart reported that the maintenance of his force in this area was becoming difficult and that, unless some respite from the enemy bombing could be gained, it might well become impossible. Bombing of Åndalsnes was also taking place and considerable damage had been done. Arrangements were then made with the Royal Air Force to land Gladiators on a frozen lake at Lesjaskog, between Åndalsnes and Dombås, as soon as the

necessary maintenance personnel could be landed. The support provided by the Royal Navy consisted of fighters from H.M.S. "Ark Royal" and "Glorious," which were to operate over the ports, and torpedo bombers, which were to attack the enemy aerodromes in the neighbourhood of Trondheim and his ships in that harbour. Anti-aircraft cruisers and sloops were also allotted to give protection to the Base Areas.

3. On the 23rd, General Paget and his staff with Brigadier Hogg and Brigadier Richards left for Norway. During this day news was received from General Carton de Wiart that Brigadier Phillips had succeeded in extricating the 146th Infantry Brigade which, supported by the French, was occupying a position covering Namsos and Bangsund.

On this day too British troops on the Southern Sector had withdrawn as the result of heavy enemy attacks to hold a line South of Tretten, and behind them an effort was being made to re-organise Norwegian troops in the sector. During the whole of this day and the next both Base Areas were continually bombed, as were forward troops and the communications between them and the Base.

4. On the evening of the 24th, the 263rd Fighter Squadron, R.A.F. (18 Gladiators) was flown ashore on Lake Lesjaskog. It was however immediately spotted by the enemy who commenced bombing next morning and continued it throughout the day. It is understood that, in spite of valiant efforts by the pilots and ground staff, but few of them were able to take off, and were quite insufficient to hold off the innumerable enemy bombers who attacked the aerodrome continuously.

5. On the 25th April, I was directed by the Chiefs of Staff to submit an appreciation on the situation in Norway. As it appeared to me then, the possibility of landing further troops or of maintaining the troops then ashore depended entirely on our being able to obtain control of the situation in the air. In my appreciation I stated this fact and gave it as my opinion that should adequate air support be available I had no reason to suppose that we could not hold our existing positions against the Germans, and at a later date eject them from Trondheim. Without it I had little doubt that any further operations would become impossible and that we should be compelled to evacuate our forces from Southern and Central Norway. I further stated that should evacuation be decided upon it would have to be done at short notice and that all necessary plans for this operation must therefore be made without delay. I requested that the Inter-Service Planning Staffs should be directed to make the necessary preparations forthwith. I was not aware when this appreciation was written that the attempt to establish the Gladiators ashore had failed.

During this day, the 148th Infantry Brigade was withdrawn to Otta and it became evident that the 15th Infantry Brigade, which had sailed under General Paget's orders, part on 22nd and part on 24th April, would be required to hold Dombås and Opdal if the process of putting further troops ashore in the Åndalsnes area was to be contemplated. Instructions to this effect were sent to General Paget in amplification of his original instructions in Appendix

"A." The situation at Namsos did not materially alter during this or the following day, though bombing of this port and Åndalsnes continued. Both towns had been completely destroyed, and as the nights were getting shorter, the amount of unloading which could be undertaken was becoming progressively less.

6. During 26th April the situation at Namsos did not materially alter. From reports received from the South however it became increasingly obvious that in the face of artillery and mortar fire and incessant bombing, to none of which the Allied troops could effectively reply, the German advance could not be stopped. General Paget stated it as his opinion that his troops could not endure for more than four days unless adequate air support was forthcoming. During the whole of this day the bombing of Åndalsnes and Namsos continued and the possibility of these ports being rendered inoperative as bases had to be faced. During the afternoon I became aware of the previous day's failure of the Gladiators to operate from a shorebased aerodrome, and it then became evident to me that the chances of our getting any air support which would enable us in any way to compete with the German air menace had practically vanished. I was convinced that evacuation would therefore be necessary. I reported my views verbally to the C.I.G.S. who informed me that the Chiefs of Staff had that morning been considering the possibility of re-instituting a modified operation for the direct attack on Trondheim, and had come to the conclusion that it would take some ten days to mount. I understood from him that, in view of the situation, the Chiefs of Staff were not prepared to recommend this course to the Government as they doubted, as I did, whether the forces in Southern Norway could hold on long enough to enable the operation to be put into effect.

7. Accordingly next morning, 27th April, I wrote an appreciation of the situation which convinced me that evacuation was necessary and that there were two main ways of doing it. In the first case, as we had few stores and little heavy equipment ashore we might, by means of a rapid evacuation of personnel only, cut our losses to the lowest level. In the second, by continuing to send anti-aircraft guns and artillery, and possibly subsequently further infantry, we might be able to hold the position for some time longer. This however would undoubtedly involve the loss of large quantities of valuable material and certainly heavy casualties in personnel. The period could not be sufficient to allow of any direct attack on Trondheim being planned and mounted. In my opinion the correct solution was a rapid withdrawal with the object of reducing our losses to the lowest possible figure.

That evening I was sent for to report to the Military Co-ordinating Committee. My report was in terms similar to those I have stated above and the Committee agreed that the evacuation was to take place and approved instructions (App. "B") given to me for the purpose. To relieve the pressure on General Paget's force the Air Ministry were requested to attack with bombers the Germans in the Gudbrandsdal valley and their communications, but this was found impossible.

8. During the 28th, plans for the evacuation were concerted with Admiralty representatives and orders were issued to both General Carton de Wiart and General Paget as to how the evacuation was to be carried out. The evacuation of the French was commenced on the night of the 28th/29th and arrangements were made for the evacuation of the remaining troops from Namsos to be completed on the nights of the 1st/2nd and 2nd/3rd May. Plans for the evacuation of Åndalsnes were for the evacuation to be carried out on two nights, 1st/2nd, and 2nd/3rd May, but the plan was made sufficiently elastic so that if necessary the process of evacuation from this latter port could be put forward 24 hours. It had been planned when the force was evacuated from Namsos that a rearguard should fall back by land to Mosjoen retiring in the face of the enemy, and that in the meantime a party should be sent by sea to ensure holding the latter port against enemy troops landed by parachute from the air, and orders to this effect were issued. General Carton de Wiart opposed this plan on the grounds that owing to lack of petrol and transport and more important still, the fact that the road during the thaw was practically impassable, the operation would be likely to end in disaster.

Subsequent telegrams did not induce him to alter his view and even the passage by the land route of a small party of French Chasseurs was by him deemed impossible. My final wire on this subject was to the effect that if in the opinion of General Audet the retirement of a small rearguard of French Chasseurs by the land route was impossible, this operation was not to take place. It was evident that, if French Chasseurs could not retire along this route, the Germans could not advance along it. In the event no withdrawal by land did take place, though this was an error as the Germans have since made full use of this route, and have advanced so rapidly along it that our troops in Mosjoen have not had time to get properly established and it is more than likely that we shall not be able to hold the place.

9. During the 29th the situation on the Namsos front did not alter. Forces operating to the southward were withdrawn to a position 3 miles south of Dombås which position General Paget proposed to hold until the night of the 30th/1st to cover the evacuation. On this day owing to urgent representations from Åndalsnes it was decided to make the dates of evacuation from this port the nights of 30th/1st and 1st/2nd and the necessary arrangements for shipping were made accordingly. Further requests that long range bombers should be directed against the enemy troops and his Lines of Communication were made to the Air Ministry who were, however, as far as I am aware, unable to comply with them. During the day however Blenheim fighters were despatched to the area and their presence resulted in the immediate disappearance of enemy bombers for the period during which the Blenheims were able to remain over the area.

10. In the early hours of the 30th April a party of 340 personnel, mostly wounded, were embarked on H.M.S. Fleetwood from Åndalsnes and at 1900 hours H.M.S. Janus embarked 100 men and two Bofors guns at Namsos and conveyed them during the night to Mosjoen, where they arrived on 2nd May having been delayed

by dense fog. During the nights 30th/1st and 1st/2nd evacuation was successfully carried out from Åndalsnes. On 1st May thick fog off Namsos prevented the ships entering the harbour. The whole evacuation of Namsos was however successfully carried out on the night of the 2nd/3rd, the last ship leaving at 0220 hours, and a total of 5,400 having been embarked during that night, an operation for which the greatest credit is due to the Naval forces employed.

11. During the whole of the 3rd the convoy was continually bombed on its passage across the North Sea. It has been reported to me that one German aeroplane continually shadowed it whilst relays of bombers came up, presumably directed by the shadowing aeroplane. That the losses were not heavier than they were is evidence of remarkable luck. The presence of some long range fighters during the day would have been invaluable, but none were available owing to question of range.

PART II.

OPERATIONS AT NAM SOS.

12. On 14th April Major-General Carton de Wiart was informed by the War Office that it had been decided to land an allied expedition in Central Norway, and that the operation was to be carried out independently of the landings already begun in the Narvik area.

13. Major-General Carton de Wiart was given written instructions (Appendix "C") on 14th April appointing him in command of the Allied forces being despatched to Central Norway, and his role was defined as "to secure the Trondheim area." He was informed that the Royal Navy were making preliminary landings in the Namsos area with landing parties about 300 strong in all, in order to seize and hold points at which disembarkation of Allied forces might subsequently take place.

The written instructions suggested the initial landing of army formations should be in the Namsos area and that this should be carried out by 146th and 148th Infantry Brigades and Chasseurs Alpins, after the Royal Navy had cleared the Trondheim fjord of German vessels.

It must be mentioned here that at the time these instructions were issued 146th Infantry Brigade was at sea with orders to land in the Narvik area; that 148th Infantry Brigade (less one battalion) was diverted to Åndalsnes; that 147th Infantry Brigade never sailed from the United Kingdom.

14. On the evening of 15th April General Carton de Wiart, with a junior staff officer, arrived at Namsos in a flying boat to confer with the naval landing parties who had already established a footing there. The flying boat and the destroyer "Somali" lying in the Namsen Fiord were repeatedly attacked by German aircraft with bombs and machine-gun fire, and General Carton de Wiart's staff officer was wounded. Meanwhile 146th Infantry Brigade had been ordered, while at sea, to go to Namsos instead of Narvik, but it was evident that the landing of these troops direct from transports was not a feasible operation at Namsos, and that they would have to be transferred to destroyers at Lillesjone and then taken to Namsos on two successive days.

15. On 16th April the first battalion arrived and were disposed to cover Namsos and

Bangsund, the remainder of 146th Infantry Brigade getting ashore during the 17th April. By the 19th April, this brigade having moved Southward from Namsos, was disposed as follows:—

Advanced Brigade Headquarters at Steinkjer.

One battalion—about Steinkjer.

One battalion—in the area South of Steinkjer including Verdal and Stiklestad.

One battalion—in the area North of Steinkjer including Bangsund.

These dispositions gave General Carton de Wiart control of the roads and railways leading Northwards from Trondheim, and placed him in a favourable position to co-operate with any direct attack on Trondheim which might be developed from seaward.

16. During the night of 19th/20th April the 5th Demi-Brigade of Chasseurs Alpins arrived in Namsos under General Audet, but with the indifferent port facilities there it was impossible to clear the two small jetties during the hours of darkness. Consequently on the following morning the large quantity of supplies, munitions and stores lying at the jetties was spotted by enemy aircraft, and for two hours the quay, station and western half of Namsos town were heavily bombed. The station and most of the town were destroyed, and one of the two jetties was badly damaged.

The French Demi-Brigade was put into billets and bivouacs close round Namsos, and, while they were settling in, General Carton de Wiart visited the headquarters of 146th Infantry Brigade at Steinkjer and met there the commander of the local Norwegian forces. So far no British troops had been in contact with German land forces.

17. At about 0600 hours on 21st April an enemy detachment of some 400 men landed at Kirkenesvaag and began to advance on Sandvollan and Strømmen. Other German landings were carried out at Hylla and Trones-tangen, and an attack was directed on Verdal. The enemy land forces were supported by war-ships operating in the Trondheim fiord.

These German landings presented a serious threat to the flank and rear of 146th Infantry Brigade who were severely hampered by having no artillery and by their inability to move anywhere off the roads on account of the deep snow.

During the afternoon of 21st April enemy aircraft were also active; Steinkjer was bombed and reduced to a flaming mass of ruins, and the roads from Steinkjer to Verdal and Stiklestad were machine-gunned and bombed.

18. In view of these events and the inability of the British infantry to operate off the roads, General Carton de Wiart decided to withdraw 146th Infantry Brigade into a position north of Steinkjer where its flanks could not be threatened, and issued orders to that effect.

During the withdrawal a German destroyer was very active with its gun fire, and enemy mortar and light artillery fire was directed upon the British battalions. In addition 4 Lincolns were attacked about Steinkjer by German ski troops and had somewhat heavy casualties. By 24th April the Brigade was established in its new position north of Steinkjer, having carried out the withdrawal in very trying conditions.

19. On 23rd April General Carton de Wiart sent a signal to the War Office that evacuation from Namsos might be advisable, since the scale of enemy air attack was heavy and he had received no further information about the proposed landing of an Allied force at Trondheim.

In reply General Carton de Wiart was instructed by Headquarters North Western Expeditionary Force to keep his force in being and to remain on the defensive in the Namsos area.

20. For the first time on 25th April British aircraft appeared over Namsos. These belonged to the Fleet Air Arm, but three were forced to land owing to lack of petrol. Their intervention, though temporary, had a beneficial effect on the air situation, but since their effect could not be sustained, enemy air activity was again unhampered during the next few days.

On account of the deep snow, which prevented movement off the roads, it was not until 26th April that a reconnaissance party of the R.A.F. started to search for landing grounds in the Namsos area.

21. On the following day the advanced party of General Carton de Wiart's staff arrived. Until now he had made use of the services of Captains Fleming and Lindsay (of the Military Intelligence Directorate) and of one General Staff Officer who had reported for duty on 23rd April at Namsos.

In the same ship as the advanced party of the staff there arrived a Royal Marine Howitzer battery, a field ambulance, a dock labour company, representatives of the base sub-area organisation, rifles and ammunition for the Norwegians, and many other natures of stores, but owing to the fact that the quay side was already piled high with French stores and that a French ship was still alongside the one usable jetty unloading transport and equipment, only the party of headquarter staff, a portion of the howitzer battery (but no ammunition) and some dock labour could be got ashore.

22. Such was the situation at Namsos when on 28th April General Carton de Wiart received the message that the evacuation of Namsos had been decided on in principle.

At a meeting with Admiral Vivian (Flag Officer commanding 20 Cruiser Squadron), General Audet and Brigadier Phillips, he decided to plan for evacuation on two successive nights. In the meantime it was possible to send away one French battalion on the night 28th/29th April in an empty ship.

It was decided that the French contingent should re-embark before the British, but that the French would leave some ski troops to operate with the British rearguard. The probable dates for evacuation were the nights of 1st/2nd and 2nd/3rd May.

On the night 28th/29th April a battery of Bofors guns was landed at Namsos. These guns were unfortunately without predictors.

23. On the following day General Carton de Wiart received the message instructing him to send a detachment to Mosjoen by sea and to post a rearguard at Grong which would delay the enemy for as long as possible and then withdraw Northwards overland to Mosjoen.

At first he appears to have been in some doubt as to whether the rearguard at Grong was intended to comprise his whole force, and he referred the matter to this Headquarters. The reply made it clear that the strength of

the rearguard to remain at Grong was left entirely to his discretion. I have referred in Part I to the abandonment of this operation.

On the 30th April, a party of 100 French Chasseurs and a British detachment with two Bofors guns was sent by destroyer to Mosjoen. Throughout that day, enemy aircraft were again active and sank H.M.S. "Bittern" and two trawlers.

24. On 1st May all arrangements were made to evacuate the French contingent, and by 2115 hours all were ready on the quayside. But no transports or destroyers arrived owing to thick fog in the Namsen Fiord, and the evacuation had to be postponed for 24 hours.

25. On 2nd May General Carton de Wiart was asked to carry out the evacuation in one night if possible, instead of two, as the Admiralty were anxious to complete the task with all speed.

After consultation with Admiral Vivian it was agreed that all troops could be got away on the night 2nd/3rd May but that no stores or equipment could be saved.

26. By 0150 hours on 3rd May all troops except a small rear party were re-embarked and the convoy sailed from Namsos.

At 0220 hours the destroyer "Afridi" took off the rear party.

At 0430 hours the usual German air reconnaissance came over Namsos and sighted the convoy which was now well out to sea.

Between 0800 hours and 1530 hours waves of enemy bombers attacked H.M. Ships and the transports. No transport ship was hit, but the French destroyer "Bison" and H.M.S. "Afridi" were sunk fighting to the end. The losses might well have been far heavier, for there were no air forces supporting the convoy.

COMMENTS.

27. In view of the instructions issued to him and the size of the force which according to those instructions was eventually to be placed at his disposal, General Carton de Wiart's action in pushing straight ahead towards Trondheim was justified. Had he been aware of the limited forces which were actually to be placed at his disposal and of the fact that the direct attack on Trondheim was not to take place, his advance would undoubtedly have been a more methodical one, and his position at Steinkjer would have been consolidated before a further advance would have been considered. The position of the 146th Infantry Brigade, with its head at Verdalen and its right flank open to attack from the Fiord by sea-borne troops, was, as events proved, a somewhat dangerous one.

The withdrawal of this Brigade when attacked was cleverly planned and executed and reflects great credit on Brigadier Phillips and the troops under his command.

28. I have already commented in Part I, paragraph 8, on the decision not to dispatch a force by road to delay the enemy in his advance on Mosjoen after the final evacuation took place. The importance of this operation was strongly stressed in several telegrams from these headquarters, its feasibility could only be left to the judgment of the man on the spot. In this case an error of judgment was made.

PART III.

OPERATIONS IN THE ÅNDALSNES AREA.

29. The area of operations was confined to the Gudbrandsdal valley between the base at Åndalsnes and Lake Mjøsa, a distance of some 140 miles. Except in the area of Lesjaskog, and at its Southern end, where there are roads on either side of Lake Mjøsa, the valley is seldom more than a mile wide and in places narrows to a few hundred yards; along the whole length of the road, river and railway interwine. The valley is flanked with mountains and hills which are covered in snow at the high levels. The side roads and tracks leading into the valley are for the most part impassable at this time of the year, except to ski troops, of whom the enemy were reported to have a considerable number. Scattered along the valley throughout its length are wooden farm buildings and occasional villages or small towns such as Åndalsnes, Lesja, Dombås, Otta, Ringebu, Øyer and Lillehammer.

30. It would be difficult to imagine a Line of Communication more exposed to air attack, to which it was continually subjected during the hours of daylight by means of heavy bombing and machine gun fire: and there were no means of protecting it nor of repairing the damage done to the roads and railway: for this latter work reliance had to be placed entirely on the Norwegians, who did their best with very limited resources. The key point of Dombås was completely destroyed by bombing and Otta almost completely so. Large craters on the road made motor transport movement increasingly difficult; it was singularly fortunate that the railway was not more seriously damaged.

31. The 148th Infantry Brigade commanded by Brigadier H. de R. Morgan and consisting initially of 1/5 Leicesters, less two companies, 8 Sherwood Foresters and one light Anti-Aircraft Battery, a total of 1,000 all ranks, landed from His Majesty's ships in the Åndalsnes area on the evening of 18th April. A force of Marines had landed previously to make preliminary arrangements. Brigadier Morgan's instructions were to land in the Åndalsnes area, secure Dombås and then operate Northwards and take offensive action against the Germans in the Trondheim area. His instructions also stated that his force was an independent command under the War Office until receipt of further orders. As a preliminary to carrying out his rôle Brigadier Morgan despatched a company to Dombås where it arrived at 0400 hours, 19th April.

32. On 19th April, the British Military Attaché, Lieutenant-Colonel King Salter, represented that the Norwegian Army was in urgent need of assistance, and stated that unless this was forthcoming immediately, the Army would abandon all further resistance. He further stated to Brigadier Morgan that the War Office had sanctioned the 148th Infantry Brigade coming under the command of the Commander-in-Chief, Norwegian Army. Owing to the urgency of the situation Brigadier Morgan decided to comply with the Norwegian request for assistance, at the same time sending a signal to the War Office for further instructions.

The Norwegian Commander-in-Chief's orders were that 148th Infantry Brigade should be sent at once to the Lillehammer area to replace

the Norwegian troops who were tired out. He hoped that the arrival of the British troops would lend fresh heart to his force and consequently he required Brigadier Morgan to attach his troops under direct command of Norwegian formations. The force was moved by train to the Lillehammer area during 19th and 20th April, where it was placed under command 2nd Norwegian Division.

33. On 21st April, it was to move forward in three groups to take up previously reconnoitred positions south of Lillehammer and on either side of Mjøsa Lake.

Owing to a German attack during the afternoon these groups never reached these positions and orders were issued for a withdrawal at 0100 hours, 22nd April, to the high ground between Fålberg and Lillehammer. During this withdrawal a party of 5 officers and 50 men, 1/5 Leicesters, was cut off and lost.

34. On 22nd April our position was heavily attacked from the air and with 3.7 inch howitzers and 4 inch mortars. Shortly after mid-day the Germans succeeded in working round the Eastern flank and a daylight withdrawal became imperative if the whole force East of the river was not to be cut off.

The Norwegians had made no arrangements for the occupation of the position in rear, but the timely arrival of the remaining two companies of 1/5 Leicesters at the base enabled them to be rushed forward by rail and bus to positions near Øyer.

The Germans made no serious efforts to follow up the withdrawal, being checked by fire and road blocks. Their aircraft were however very active and the force suffered heavy casualties from bombs and machine gun fire from the air.

The position at Øyer was reached by about 1800 hours, though battalions and companies were somewhat mixed. At this hour the force was some 12 miles in front of any formed body of Norwegians though three squadrons of the Dragoons, a motorised machine-gun unit, were placed under Brigadier Morgan's command, with orders to report to him at Tretten.

35. During the night 22nd/23rd April the British force fell back to a previously reconnoitred position just South of Tretten.

Owing to this continued withdrawal rations had been jettisoned in order to transport troops so there was a shortage of supplies. Also positions were not entrenched, as all tools had been left behind in the early stages of the withdrawal. Consequently the men were lying in the open exposed to full view of the enemy aircraft and to artillery fire.

36. During 23rd April the Germans brought up a section of 5.9 howitzers and at least two tanks. They again started working round our Eastern flank and a further withdrawal became essential. Owing to the difficulties of communications it is doubted whether the forward companies ever received any orders and they were cut off by the enemy getting round behind them.

The withdrawal of the remainder was followed up by tanks and aircraft and casualties were heavy, but the forward companies were still holding out and must have inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. The Norwegians had taken up a defensive position about Favang and the remainder of the force withdrew through them during the night 23rd/24th April.

By this time the 1 K.O.Y.L.I. from 15th Brigade had arrived from Åndalsnes and on 24th April reached Otta with orders to occupy a position behind the Norwegians about Kvam.

During the above period 148th Brigade suffered about 700 casualties, while only two combatant officers were left with the Leicesters and four with the Foresters.

37. In the instructions issued to Major-General Paget by Lieutenant-General Massy on 22nd April (Appendix A) he was given the task of co-operating with the Norwegian Army in preventing the Northward advance of the German Army based in Southern Norway, and at the same time in safeguarding his left and rear against attack by the German forces in Trondheim and parachute landed detachments on his Line of Communications of over 100 miles.

38. On arrival at Åndalsnes on the evening of 25th April, General Paget went forward by car to meet the Commander-in-Chief of the Norwegian Army, General Ruge, who, with a staff of about six officers, was then in a small farm house on the hillside 10 miles South of Dombås. General Paget had been told en route by the British Minister, whom he saw at the Park Royal, Åndalsnes, that General Ruge was the only man who could keep the Norwegian forces in the field, and this would certainly appear to have been the case. General Ruge was gravely concerned about the smallness of the British forces and the fact that he was not fully aware of our plans. He said that his own troops were exhausted in trying to hold up the German advance from the South pending the arrival of British reinforcements, and that they could fight no more until they had been thoroughly rested, re-organised and re-equipped.

General Paget came to the conclusion that this was right, and that he could look for very little support from these troops. He asked, however, that Norwegian ski detachments should be used to protect the flanks on the high ground as he had no means of doing this himself, and General Ruge promised that they would do so and would operate under British command. General Ruge then said, and later confirmed in writing, that General Paget was to be entirely responsible for the Gudbrandsdal valley, and also for the protection of the railway from Dombås as far North as Opdal (40 miles North of Dombås).

During the following day all other Norwegian troops were withdrawn from the area South of Dombås down the Gudbrandsdal valley towards Åndalsnes.

39. 1 K.O.Y.L.I. were thus the most forward Allied troops and were holding a position across the valley at Kvam with 1 Y. & L. in a supporting position some two miles in rear about Sjoa. 1 Green Howards moved up from Åndalsnes to Dombås by train joining the remnants of 148th Infantry Brigade in that place.

By 1600 hrs. it was obvious that 1 K.O.Y.L.I. could not maintain their front much longer. They had held the Kvam position for nearly 48 hours, in spite of repeated enemy attacks, and were constantly subjected to enemy artillery fire, air bombing and low flying machine gun fire. Brigadier Kent Lemon was therefore ordered to withdraw 1 K.O.Y.L.I. on the night

of 26th/27th April by motor transport to Dombås through 1 Y. & L. This latter battalion was to remain in its present position, reinforced by one company Green Howards (sent up in motor transport from Dombås), and thus cover the preparation of a strong position just South of Otta.

The situation on the left flank was causing some anxiety, as the enemy were reported to have reached Alvdal in the Østerdalen valley. There were only small detachments of Norwegian troops at Foldal and Hjerkin. Hence it was possible for the enemy to develop a threat against the Lines of Communications by way of Foldal, Hjerkin, Dombås. Brigadier Morgan was, therefore, placed in command of the troops in Dombås to organise the defence of the village with his own force (400 strong but short of officers and weapons) and one company of the Green Howards, who were given the task of blocking the Hjerkin road.

The remainder of the Green Howards was then moved by train at night to Otta to occupy a position South of the village as a firm base in rear of 1 Y. & L.

During the withdrawal of 1 K.O.Y.L.I. several minor demolitions were successfully carried out.

40. General Paget's object at this stage was still to stop the enemy. He judged that he could not expect his forward troops to withstand the enemy for more than 48 hours in any one position without any form of artillery and air support. Planning was therefore directed to delaying the enemy as much as possible so as to give time for the arrival of artillery and air support. When this should arrive little difficulty was anticipated in stopping the enemy.

41. The withdrawal of 1 K.O.Y.L.I. was successfully carried out, and 1 Y. & L. held the Sjoa position throughout the day. The enemy had been slow in following up and did not press his attack for the time being, contenting himself with air and ground bombardment.

1 Green Howards organised the Otta position for defence, and the preparation of Dombås defences was continued. Owing to the rocky nature of the ground it was seldom possible to dig and concealment from air was essential.

During the morning a report from the French Military Attaché again indicated enemy action from the direction Foldal-Hjerkin. General Ruge was confident in the ability of his detachment to hold off any such threats; but General Paget judged that a reconnaissance was desirable in case it became necessary to reinforce the Norwegian troops. Unfortunately a breakdown in motor transport limited this reconnaissance to the vicinity of Dombås.

42. Throughout the day the need for reconnaissance aircraft was acute, not only for normal tasks, but also to confirm or deny the many alarmist reports received.

At a conference with General Ruge earlier in the day it was agreed that the Otta position was a strong one, on which there should be a good chance of holding the enemy until the arrival of guns from the base.

General Ruge requested that the Otta position should be held until a Norwegian detachment, which had been isolated in the hills West of Tretten, could be withdrawn by the road leading into the Gudbrandsdal in the area Otta-Sel. To this General Paget replied that he would be prepared, with the situation as it

was then, to hold the Otta position for two or three days, and that he would do his best to cover the Norwegian detachment's withdrawal. The Otta position required two battalions to hold it, and as the Y. and L. would have found difficulty in defending the Sjoa position they were ordered to withdraw on the night 27th/28th to reinforce the Green Howards on the Otta position.

This withdrawal was not as successful as on the previous night. The enemy had anticipated it, and made every effort to work round the flank. Parties of the enemy (dressed as Norwegian troops) succeeded in cutting off some of the forward companies, and eventually only some 12 officers and 300 men were available to assist the Green Howards on the Otta position. Many of 1 Y. and L. who had been thus cut off rejoined subsequently after an adventurous passage of the hills on the flanks of the valley.

43. At about 0500 hours the liaison officer who had taken up the motor transport for the withdrawal of 1 Y. and L. returned to General Paget's headquarters with the news of the difficulties experienced by this battalion. In his opinion the Y. and L. were not in a fit state to hold their sector of the Otta position, which would have to be held solely by the Green Howards.

This situation necessitated some precautionary measures. Movement of troops in the open or on the Lines of Communication by daylight could be justified only as a last resort; but there were still some two and a half hours left before the usual time of arrival of the German morning air reconnaissance. Throughout the operations the enemy was methodical in his air action, and his probable active hours could be forecast with accuracy.

44. The company of the Green Howards in Dombås was, therefore, ordered into a concealment area some two miles to the South of Dombås, with motor transport immediately available for a further forward movement if necessary.

At the same time the K.O.Y.L.I. in Dombås were placed at one hour's notice to move.

While these adjustments were being made, the first news of the intended evacuation reached headquarters. The War Office telegram requested acceptance of a plan or a suggested alternative. General Paget considered he could not answer this without reference to General Ruge, as the evacuation was not possible without his co-operation.

He therefore went to his headquarters and told him frankly the situation, which at the first General Ruge was unable to accept. Finally, he did so, on General Paget's assurance that British troops would cover the withdrawal of the Norwegian Army and would not relinquish Dombås until this had been effected.

45. Meanwhile the situation of the Green Howards and Y. and L. was causing anxiety at the headquarters of the 15th Infantry Brigade. Y. and L. had not recovered from the severe handling they had received during the previous night's withdrawal, and though Green Howards were in good heart they were all too few to cover an extensive position. The enemy had gained contact at 1030 hours, and quickly began a methodical bombardment of the forward troops with artillery and mortars. The bombing and the machine gun fire on the

forward troops were the heaviest experienced up to that time. It was apparent that to hold the position until dark and then extricate the forward battalions might be a matter of considerable difficulty.

46. The time and space problem of the withdrawal had now to be considered. The major factors were:—

(a) The obligation to cover the withdrawal of all Norwegian troops in this area.

(b) The shipping available on the nights 29th/30th April, 30th April/1st May, 1st/2nd May.

(c) The withdrawal would be dependent on one single railway line and one road over a distance of 100 miles.

(d) The physical endurance of the troops.

It was obvious from the start that demolition must play a large part in the plan. A vital point was the bridge over the Rostå gorge between Dovre and Otta. If this was successfully blown, the enemy would be unlikely to get tanks, guns or wheeled vehicles forward of the gorge for at least 48 hours.

One section of the 55 Field Company, R.E., was withdrawn at once from the forward area to prepare the Rostå demolitions, and the company of Green Howards, then in concealment South of Dombås, was sent to cover their preparations.

47. During the afternoon and early evening the Green Howards on the Otta position fought splendidly. One medium and two light tanks were destroyed by the 25 mm. Anti-Tank Company. Other targets included reconnaissance parties and groups of enemy in buildings. There is no doubt that the enemy suffered many casualties in this battle and his subsequent actions showed little desire or ability to press home an attack. It was, however, irritating in the extreme, owing to lack of artillery, to be unable to deal with the German close support guns, which came into action in the open, outside the range of British light machine guns and 3 in. mortars.

At about 1800 hours the K.O.Y.L.I. were ordered to occupy the position South of Dombås, which had been reconnoitred in the morning.

48. The plan for the night withdrawal is worth considering in some detail, because it was the first of a series of precarious operations, where the balance between success and disaster was extremely slender.

Otta is some 25 miles from Dombås, where lay the next secure base occupied by the K.O.Y.L.I. The only means of transport available were the train and a very limited amount of motor transport, both of which had to be wheeled out of the Norwegians. The motor transport was allotted to the rear parties. The train was assembled at Dombås and the motor transport at Dovre, with a staff officer in charge of each. Both started about 2000 hours. The train ran forward to Rudi and the motor transport to Formo, both of which were close behind the front line. At about 2030 hours the fighting slackened on the whole front and the withdrawal started at 2300 hours, the troops falling steadily back on the train and motor transport column.

The train left Rudi about 0230 hours, and the troops detrained into assembly areas at Dombås between 0500 and 0600 hours, where

they were covered by 1 K.O.Y.L.I. in position South of Dombås.

Demolitions at Rostå and Dovre were blown after the rear parties had crossed the bridges.

49. The breakaway was clean, and the fact that the enemy made no immediate attempt to follow it up was undoubtedly due to the reverse he had suffered during the afternoon.

The value of the Norwegian Ski Troops operating on the flanks should be mentioned. They were the only means of flank protection, and were of great value in guarding against surprise.

During the night 28th/29th April, many Norwegian troops were withdrawn from the Lines of Communication and there was a possibility of having no troops between Dombås and the base at Åndalsnes, some 60 miles away.

The obvious danger was that enemy parachute detachments might land on the Lines of Communication. Brigadier Morgan's force was therefore disposed in detachments at Lesja, Lesjaverk, Lesjaskog and Verma, with as much transport for each detachment as he could raise.

50. During the night 28th/29th April, General Paget's headquarters moved to Botheim. An early reconnaissance made of the Dombås position disclosed that the K.O.Y.L.I. was well established there, with the Green Howards and Y. and L. just assembling in the woods after their train withdrawal.

During the morning, General Ruge pointed out that he could not withdraw his Foldal detachment until the night 29th/30th April. There could thus be no question of the withdrawal of British troops from Dombås until night 30th April/1st May. This meant the enemy had 48 hours to follow up from Otta, and that another battle might have to be fought on the Dombås position. General Ruge offered the support of a Norwegian Field Battery of four guns, which was gratefully accepted. These guns were later to prove most useful.

The enemy was very active all day in the air, bombing and machine gunning all movement on the Lines of Communication. It was the habit of his bombers to fly direct to their objective, drop their bombs at the most convenient height, and then on their way home to carry out low flying machine gun attacks on the road traffic.

51. About noon Lieut. Colonel Clarke arrived from England to say that shipping would be available as follows:—

Night 29th/30th April for 1,000-1,500 personnel.

Night 30th April/1st May for 2,200 personnel.

Night 1st/2nd May for the remainder if necessary.

The plan made as a result of this was to withdraw 1 Y. and L. from Dombås and send them with Base Details on the night 29th/30th April.

On night 30th April/1st May:—

(a) 15th Infantry Brigade and all troops (less 1 Y. and L.) would withdraw from present positions through the Royal Marines (covering Åndalsnes) and embark.

(b) The following were approximate strengths:—

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|-----|-------|
| H.Q. Sickle Force | ... | ... | 40 |
| 1 K.O.Y.L.I. | ... | ... | 500 |
| 1 Green Howards | ... | ... | 500 |
| Anti-Tank Company | ... | ... | 80 |
| Section, 55 Field Company | ... | ... | 100 |
| 168 Light A.A. Battery | ... | ... | 65 |
| H.Q. 15 Infantry Brigade | ... | ... | 60 |
| Signals, 15th Infantry Brigade... | ... | ... | 40 |
| Morgan's Force | ... | ... | 400 |
| | | | 1,775 |

(c) Transport: By Motor Transport.

| | | |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Leave Dombås 2030 hrs. | } | 55 Field Company |
| | | H.Q. 15th Infantry Bde. & Sig. Sec. Rear parties K. O. Y. L. I. and Green Howards. |

By Train

| | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Leave Dombås 2130 hrs. | } | 1 K.O.Y.L.I. |
| | | 1 Green Howards (less rear parties) Anti-tank Coy. Details R.E. & R.A. |

This plan was communicated to Norwegian G.H.Q. and the necessary details arranged.

During night 29th/30th April the Norwegian detachments at Hjerkin and Foldal withdrew through the British force at Dombås. These were the last Norwegian troops in the area for the covering of whose withdrawal General Paget was responsible.

52. The train conveying the Y. and L. to Åndalsnes on the night 29th/30th April only reached Lesjaskog, owing to a break in the line. There was no train available to take them on from the other side of the break to Åndalsnes, so they marched on.

Enemy reconnaissance aircraft and bombers were active, but no other special incident occurred during the day until 1530 hours when 15th Infantry Brigade reported that the enemy could be seen advancing up the valley from Dovre. The early reports were conflicting, one mentioned four battalions, another parachute troops, a third transport. The force was probably the usual reconnaissance detachment, possibly reinforced by machine gun and mortar detachments landed by parachutes. This contact, though not unexpected, was undesirably early. There were some five to six hours of daylight left and it seemed possible for the enemy to stage an attack on the K.O.Y.L.I. from which it might be difficult to extricate them.

53. The K.O.Y.L.I. were extremely well hidden; it is probable that the Germans were surprised to find them there at all, and they must have been even more surprised when the Norwegian guns opened fire on their forward positions. Lieutenant-Colonel Cass commanding 1 K.O.Y.L.I. had made a very wise decision earlier in the day to withdraw his right company across the river, as the water level had risen considerably, making the river unfordable for the withdrawal. When later the Germans made contact, they were forced to use rubber boats to attempt the crossing. These were all destroyed and their crews knocked out.

The enemy's forward troops were supported by a close reconnaissance aircraft, which

dropped bombs and flares on likely targets. Fortunately this aircraft was shot down by our troops early in the engagement and thus the Norwegian battery was able to shoot unmolested.

About 1800 hours Brigadier Kent Lemon sent a reassuring message to the effect that he was confident he could hold the enemy, and that he was adopting an aggressive attitude. The train was assembled in the Dombås tunnel, wherein it lay all day. This tunnel was indeed providential throughout the operations. It housed trains, rations, ammunition and stores, and was a secure refuge for the Norwegian station staff, without whose help the system could not have been maintained.

54. During the afternoon it was discovered that owing to a misunderstanding Brigadier Morgan had withdrawn his anti-parachute detachments at Lesja, Lesjaverk and Lesjaskog. This might have had serious results as all Norwegian troops had also been withdrawn from this area. The Anti-Tank Company was therefore sent back to occupy Lesja against parachute attack, and to meet a possible threat by German ski troops using the Vagamo-Lesja road.

Throughout the day there had been considerable doubt as to whether the line was clear to Åndalsnes; but by 1700 hours it was reported in working order, and the withdrawal started according to plan. The train started a little late, but both it and the rear parties in Motor Transport got away well and the road and railway demolitions West of Dombås were blown.

The train stopped at Lesja to pick up the Anti-Tank Company and 300 Norwegian Infantry—the last Norwegian troops to be withdrawn.

55. Headquarters moved back by motor transport and efforts were made en route by telephone to find out the progress of the train. These were unsuccessful until Verma (19 miles from Åndalsnes) was reached. There the unwelcome news was learned that there was a break in the line near Lesjaskog. The train had been wrecked by a bomb crater. Both engines had overturned, the front coach had telescoped and there were a good many casualties. This meant that the troops would have a 17 miles march to the nearest shelter which was in the tunnel at Verma.

A staff officer was sent to get Marines up from Romsdalshorn to cover the Verma Gorge and to get as much transport forward as he could to help the troops in their journey from Lesjaskog to Verma.

56. At 0100 hours the troops set out on their long march to Verma. It was, of course, too much to hope that they would gain the security of the Verma tunnel before the early enemy air patrols were active, but it was very desirable that as many as possible should have crossed the open Lesjaskog plateau and have reached the comparative safety of the Verma Gorge.

The Marines came up about 0530 hours and established a road block near the scene of the train wreck which they held till 1000 hrs., subsequently withdrawing to cover the first of a series of demolitions arranged in the Verma Gorge.

With the aid of some motor transport all the troops were in the tunnel by 0900 hours, but their destination had been spotted by the enemy aircraft and many of them had been subjected to low flying attacks on their way back.

The tunnel merits description. In it was a loaded ammunition train; the train which was the only means of reaching Åndalsnes, and 1,500 troops, who were packed like sardines and filled the tunnel completely. The tunnel itself ran through the side of a hill and was bomb proof.

57. Throughout the morning the men slept, disturbed occasionally by bombing and low flying machine gun attacks on the entrances to the tunnel. In the afternoon they began to recover and their spirits were remarkably good, giving proof once again of the high powers of endurance of the British soldier.

A conference was held at 1600 hours at which orders for the withdrawal to Åndalsnes were issued. The train was to start at 2230 hours and the rear parties by motor transport at 2300 hours.

At about 1730 the engine in the tunnel began to get up steam and the tunnel filled with dense smoke. It was necessary to get the men out of the tunnel and accept the risk of their detection. They behaved very steadily and went quickly outside to disperse.

58. At about 1800 hours a message came in reporting that the Marines at the head of the Gorge had broken and the enemy had made contact in some strength.

Both K.O.Y.L.I. and Green Howards deployed immediately and the former sent back one company some 2,000 yards up the Gorge to reinforce a platoon of Green Howards already in position.

The Norwegian station-master was asked to get the train ready as soon as possible. He estimated that it would be ready by 2000 hours. Success or failure now depended on the loyalty and goodwill of the Norwegian railwaymen. As a precaution the engine driver was placed under an armed guard. There was no doubt that the troops, tired as they were, could hold off the enemy; but it was necessary that the withdrawal should not be interfered with as the train ran forward up the valley for about half a mile before turning North to Åndalsnes.

At 2030 hours the train was ready and the troops started to entrain. They were very steady and the whole entraining was quickly carried out covered once more by rear parties whose motor transport was waiting on the road below.

59. The only remaining anxiety was the security of the 300 Norwegian Infantry who had entrained at Lesja. Transport had gone up to Lesjaskog to evacuate them early in the morning, but their subsequent return was not confirmed. The train journey was without further incident and the troops arrived on the quay at Åndalsnes about 2300 hours to embark. They were taken on board H.M.S. "Birmingham," H.M.S. "Manchester," and H.M.S. "Calcutta," while H.M.S. "Auckland" remained for the rear parties who were all on board by 0200 hours.

Åndalsnes had been bombed earlier in the evening but the actual embarkation was carried out unmolested, and once again thanks are due to the Royal Navy for rescuing the Army from a precarious situation as they did twenty-five years ago.

COMMENTS.

60. Without being unduly wise after the event it is possible to make certain general comments.

Brigadier Morgan's decision to exceed his instructions and move his forces forward to the support of the Norwegians was in the circumstances entirely justified.

Owing to a misunderstanding the Norwegian Commander-in-Chief was under the impression that Brigadier Morgan's force was under his orders. Brigadier Morgan cannot be in any way blamed therefore for deciding to place himself under the orders of the Norwegian C. in C., and once having done so for employing his force in accordance with these orders.

61. Desire to carry out these orders may, however, have led him to adopt tactics which were not the best calculated to enable his force to provide the strongest support to the Norwegians or to give it the best chance of stopping the German advance. The Norwegian Army was withdrawing in the face of a rapid German advance. As our Manual on the subject teaches (Mil. Training Pamphlet No. 23, Part VI Withdrawal, Sec. 2) "the first step in the process of withdrawal will be the establishment of fresh troops on a position in the rear of those troops which are in contact with the enemy and through which the latter can retire. This position should be at such a distance that the troops occupying it will be given time to devise an effective defence before the position is reached by the enemy."

62. A more effective solution of the problem therefore would have been the establishment of the Brigade on a selected naturally strong position some distance in rear of the Norwegians where they would have had time to dig in and organise a proper defence. Such a position might well have enabled the Brigade, ill equipped as it was, with the aid of proper demolitions, to obtain protection against the attacks of Armoured Fighting Vehicles and to get sufficient cover to withstand bombardment and to hold off infantry attacks for a prolonged period. Behind such a position the Norwegians would have had a better opportunity to re-organise than was in fact ever given them.

63. After the arrival of Major-General Paget, I have no detailed comments to make on these operations except to say that there is abundant evidence to show that they were conducted with great skill and energy on the part of General Paget. The fact that it was possible to withdraw this force over a distance of 100 miles under the conditions which have been described in this narrative, to fight five rearguard actions and finally to re-embark without enemy interference is in itself a magnificent tribute to the skilled and determined leadership not only of the Commander but also of the subordinate commanders, notably Brigadier Kent Lemon, commanding 15th Infantry Brigade and Lieut.-Colonel Robinson, commanding 1 Green Howards, and also to the endurance, discipline and fighting qualities of the troops engaged; also to the fine work of the Royal Engineers in the destruction of communications which successfully delayed the enemy for the required period.

PART IV.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS.

64. I now proceed to set down what are, in my opinion, the salient lessons to be learned from the operations which have terminated with the evacuation of Central Norway.

65. *Co-operation with the Royal Navy.*

I am able to report with confidence that the co-operation between the Navy, including the Fleet Air Arm, and the Army has been of the highest standard possible.

Every officer to whom I have spoken is full of praises of the efficiency, the tireless devotion to duty and the complete disregard of personal safety of all ranks of the Navy with whom they came in contact.

The whole of the forces operating in Norway fully realise the deep debt of gratitude they owe to their sister service both for the support the latter gave them ashore and for the efficiency with which they were withdrawn at the end.

The arrival of the carriers of the Fleet Air Arm off the coast, and the operation of the Skuas and Rocs, gave a respite from bombing to the ports, especially Namsos, which was invaluable. The Germans would not face our Fleet Air Arm fighters which were handled with a boldness that was an inspiration to the troops who watched their manoeuvres from the ground.

Similarly the anti-aircraft cruisers and sloops, though continuously and heavily bombed themselves, kept station in the confined waters of the Fjords at the ports until their ammunition was exhausted and, by doing so, so affected the accuracy of the enemy bombing with their fire that the damage done whilst they were present was much reduced.

No words of mine can adequately express the gratitude and admiration I feel for the skill in planning and efficiency in execution of the tasks which the Navy have carried out in support of the forces in Norway.

66. *Armies and Air Support.*

The first outstanding lesson of these operations has been the vital need for air support for a modern army.

As in Poland, the Germans have used their air force in the closest co-operation with their military forces. They have been employed in three main ways:—

(a) In direct support of their forward troops.

(b) To attack H.Q. and communications.

(c) To attack Base areas and aerodromes.

In the case of (a) high level bombing has been employed, but in addition low level bombing with small bombs from as low as 400 feet and the machine gunning of individual posts has been undertaken continuously.

Headquarters have been unceasingly bombed. It is not known whether the position of these was indicated by spies or German sympathisers who were working behind our lines, or by direction-finding of the wireless sets operating near these headquarters. The effect of this bombing on the conduct of operations is always serious and may easily be disastrous. The effect on the Lines of Communication was not serious. Craters were quickly filled and rails repaired. Such bombing is of a harassing value only. Unchecked bombing of communications will undoubtedly make supply and maintenance very difficult but it is infinitely less effective than direct attacks on troops using those communications.

The attack on the Bases was continuous and persistent. During the course of one day's bombing of Åndalsnes, which commenced at

0700 hours and ended at 2100 hours, some 400 heavy bombs up to 500 kg. were dropped in addition to countless numbers of incendiary bombs. The methods employed were high level bombing at between 10,000 and 15,000 feet and dive bombing from 8,000 to 2,000.

As a result the port became unusable by day, wooden quays were destroyed, and stone and concrete quays and their approaches were seriously damaged. In one day one Norwegian torpedo boat, three trawlers and two ferry steamers were sunk.

67. As has been recounted above, valiant efforts were made to operate Gladiators from the neighbourhood of Åndalsnes. These, however, failed because the enemy, having immediately noticed their arrival, bombed the airfield continuously throughout the day. Had they succeeded I have little doubt that a marked change would have come over the whole situation. As I have already reported when referring to the work of the Fleet Air Arm, the German bomber will not stand up to the boldly handled fighter, and there can be no question but that, had these Gladiators been able to keep the air until Hurricanes and subsequently Blenheims could have operated, the Allied troops would have had no difficulty in landing the guns and other supporting arms they needed and in entirely stopping the German advance.

68. It is easy to be wise after the event, but it is now quite obvious that the establishment of an aerodrome in the face of hostile aircraft is a combined operation requiring the most careful planning.

Looking back on this operation it is clear that there are several essentials:—

(a) Strong A.A. Defences must be established before the first aircraft arrives.

(b) All preparations must be made so that aircraft can operate in the shortest possible time after landing.

(c) During the period of first arrival, long range fighters or Fleet Air Arm fighters should be provided to cover the landing.

(d) Sufficient aircraft must be landed to provide continuous protection for the aerodrome and to provide protection for the establishment of at least a second aerodrome.

(e) Bombers should be flown on as soon as the aerodrome is secure.

69. I have already reported that several requests were made to the Air Ministry for Bombers to attack the German Forces moving up the Gudbrandsdal valley and the communications behind them.

This was found impossible, and I am not in a position to question the correctness of this decision.

I can, however, say that had it been possible to attack the German Army and its communications, a direct effect on the operations would have been achieved with a considerable saving certainly in material. The withdrawal and evacuation could not then have been closely followed up by the enemy, as in fact it was, and the process of evacuation need therefore not have been as hurried as it necessarily was under the existing conditions.

I have no hesitation in saying that it is essential that a degree of co-operation between the Army and the Air Force, comparable to that which is now the case with Germans, is essential

if we are not to remain at a dangerous disadvantage. The direction of the two forces in any theatre of war must be the task of one commander in that theatre if results are to be obtained commensurate with the effort made.

70. *The Dangers of Improvisation.*

A further outstanding lesson of these operations is the grave handicap under which both the commanders and the troops suffer when force and formation headquarters are improvised and thrown together at the last moment.

For this campaign in Central Norway the expeditionary force headquarters was ordered to form after active operations, involving British troops, had begun, and I was charged with the conduct of those operations whilst my headquarters was still in the process of assembling.

I cannot stress too strongly the dangers of such improvisation. It is clear that we were taken by surprise by the methods which the Germans employed to seize the key points in Norway, and consequently we were forced to resort to unorthodox methods of procedure.

Even if it is hoped that a landing will be unopposed, efforts to build up the Base and Lines of Communication organization must be continuous from the earliest possible moment. I realise that difficulties arose owing to a change of plan and shipping limitations, but, when evacuation was decided upon, the organization at Åndalsnes was very incomplete while that at Namsos had hardly started. As a result, no clear administrative picture was ever available as regards either force, the consequences of which might have been serious.

It is quite certain that the functions of 2nd Echelon cannot be carried out in the United Kingdom for a force operating under Norwegian conditions. 2nd Echelon for the forces based upon Åndalsnes and Namsos was located in Margate and, as a result of long and uncertain communications and of changes in plan, was never in touch with the situation.

71. The least that can now be done is to ensure that this undesirable situation does not occur again, and that provision is made for a force headquarters and certain formations and units and a complete establishment of Base and Line of Communication units which can be held as reserve for use in any theatre to which the war may spread, including France if necessary.

I submit that the nucleus of such a force should be:—

A Corps Headquarters, modified to control an expeditionary force.

One regular division.

One territorial division.

A small armoured brigade.

Certain corps troops.

Base and Line of Communication units.

2nd Echelon for all the above.

If a reserve such as this is to be able to act swiftly and decisively at any point overseas, there are certain other requirements which must be met.

These are:—

(a) Time for training in amphibian operations.

(b) A suitable training area.

(c) An allotment of landing craft and ships fitted to carry them.

(d) Facilities for studying and practising air co-operation, particularly with a fighter and bomber component.

72. *The Provision and Loading of Ships.*

The provision of suitable shipping for an overseas expedition has always been difficult because our merchant shipping in peace is designed either for passengers or for cargo. Neither of these types is suitable for the carriage of the large number of motor vehicles now in use by the Army.

The result, so far as the expedition to Southern Norway was concerned, was well-nigh disastrous. Guns were landed without their detachments and with little or no ammunition; vehicles arrived without their drivers. Even the essential first line transport of infantry battalions was divorced from its units.

Again I realise that this was due to a certain extent to a change of plan which aggravated an already difficult shipping situation, but we cannot accept a situation which admits of no strategical and tactical elasticity.

I am convinced that, if troops are proceeding overseas to land at a point where they may go directly into action, units must be embarked complete with their weapons, ammunition and equipment, and accompanied in the same convoy by their M.T. with its drivers.

This object could be achieved in various ways:—

- (a) By constructing new ships.
- (b) By altering existing shipping.
- (c) By loading available ships tactically.

I realise that it is uneconomical to keep shipping idle or available at short notice for a hypothetical operation, and that at present our resources are inadequate; but I am quite certain that we must find some way out of this difficulty. It will almost certainly be necessary to use existing ships with little alteration and in that case personnel may have to travel under conditions of extreme discomfort for short periods. We must be prepared to accept such conditions. To put our troops ashore under any other conditions is to court disaster if on arrival they are required to go straight into action.

73. I would further emphasize the grave consequences which may arise if a change of plan is made after troops and stores have been embarked. Even had the air situation in Southern Norway been favourable to us, the order of arrival of troops, weapons and vehicles at Åndalsnes and Namsos was based on plans prepared for an unopposed entry into the country.

In the event, the order was such that the force that arrived ashore was deficient of supporting arms and was in no condition to engage an enemy properly organised and equipped as was the German Army to which it was opposed.

74. *Military Doctrine.*

These operations have confirmed the correctness of the principles, laid down in our training manuals, which should guide us in the varying phases of warfare. The principles of war remain, though occasions have undoubtedly occurred where we have not been sufficiently quick to grasp their application to new and somewhat unexpected conditions.

75. *Morale and Discipline.*

Finally I desire to draw your attention to the generally excellent behaviour of the British troops and their leaders, especially their junior officers. Brigadier Morgan's 148th Infantry

Brigade were young soldiers or Territorials to whom these operations were their first experience of war. These quite inexperienced troops were rushed into action in an effort to stem the German advance, when the Norwegian forces were already withdrawing. With their flanks turned owing to the fact that the exhausted Norwegian troops had been obliged to withdraw, and their centre pierced by armoured vehicles to which they had no adequate reply, owing to the loss of their anti-tank guns at sea, it is not surprising that their casualties in missing were heavy, and heavier than would have been the case with more experienced troops under more experienced regimental officers' leadership.

76. The behaviour of Brigadier Phillips' 146th Infantry Brigade has been reported as excellent. When this Brigade, quite unsupported as it was, was shelled and practically cut off by superior enemy forces, it proved only too clearly that man for man the British soldier is far superior to his German counterpart. By skilful handling, good discipline and good fighting qualities the battalions of this Brigade extricated themselves from a position which might well have been conceived as disastrous. The only occasion when confusion and needless casualties were caused was one which was due to an error of judgment on the part of an inexperienced company commander. The fighting qualities displayed in both these Brigades was excellent. The great importance that these young troops should be given the advantage of the best leadership that we can provide cannot be over-stated. To ensure this a strong nucleus of regular officers in every unit is essential.

77. The 15th Infantry Brigade gave an account of itself which is in accordance with the highest traditions of the British Army. Though bombed, shelled and machine-gunned without the means of adequate reply, it repulsed a series of enemy attacks supported by tanks with heavy losses in men and tanks to the enemy, at the expense of comparatively few casualties to itself. In its final withdrawal it proved that it had nothing to learn in cohesion and marching power from its predecessors, the old contemptibles of 1914.

78. The Demi-Brigade of French Chasseurs under the command of General Audet who were landed at Namsos were only engaged in patrol combats with the enemy. I have received, however, the highest reports of their efficiency, their cheerfulness and generally excellent bearing, and their hardihood under conditions of extreme discomfort which might well have shaken the morale of less highly trained troops. I have no doubt but that they would have been, and indeed yet will be, far more than a match for the finest troops the Germans can bring against them.

79. I am not delaying this report to include in it the names of the many different officers and other ranks whose services I desire to bring to your notice and whose names I will forward at an early date. I do, however, desire to put on record now the services rendered by Major-General B. C. T. Paget, for the skill with which he conducted operations on the southern front from the time he took command until the final evacuation. Major-General A. Carton de Wiart proved that he still possesses the energy and dash for which he has

always been famous. Brigadier C. G. Phillips proved by his handling of his Brigade during the difficult days of Steinkjer, that he is a commander of marked ability. Brigadier Morgan gave abundant evidence of the capacity for making decisions which is so essential in a commander. Brigadier Kent Lemon proved himself a skilful and determined leader.

APPENDIX A.

Headquarters, 5th Corps,
22nd April, 1940.
Copy No.

EXPEDITIONARY FORCE INSTRUCTION NO. 1.

To:—

Major-General B. C. T. Paget,
D.S.O., M.C.

SICKLE FORCE.

1. (a) A German Army of about one Corps, based on Southern Norway, is operating against the Norwegian Army, which is believed to be fighting a delaying action on the approximate line Hamar—Elverum.

(b) The Germans have also landed about 3,000 men at Bergen; at Stavanger, where they have occupied the aerodrome; and at Trondheim, where they have between 3,500 and 5,000 men and at least two destroyers. The aerodrome at Vaernes, near Trondheim, is also in their hands.

(c) The German force in the Trondheim area is believed to be disposed as under, but the numbers may be increased by airborne reinforcements.

(i) 1,500 in the area Levanger—Verdalen facing the British force based on Namsos.

(ii) 500 protecting the coast defences at the entrance to the Trondheim Fjord about Agdenes.

(iii) 200 at Stören (25 miles South of Trondheim) operating in a Southerly direction.

(iv) 300 operating on the Trondheim—Østersund railway to the East of Trondheim.

2. Allied forces, consisting of 146 Infantry Brigade and a demi-brigade of Chasseurs Alps, both under command of Major-General Carton de Wiart, are based on Namsos. If possible these forces are to be kept in being in order to maintain pressure against Trondheim from the North.

You have been informed separately of the composition of the British forces now operating South of Dombås and of the forces to accompany you.

3. A force of Gladiators will, it is hoped, be ashore by the 25th April. In the meantime a Carrier with fighter aircraft will be off your base at Åndalsnes. Contact with these should be arranged through Brigadier Hogg at the Base.

4. An advanced skeleton Corps H.Q., under the orders of Brigadier Hogg (D.A. & Q.M.G.) is travelling with you and will be responsible for:—

(a) Organising the Base at Åndalsnes and organising the anti-aircraft defence of that Base.

(b) Reconnoitring a subsidiary base at Geiranger and arranging for its anti-aircraft defence and for the requisitioning of trans-

port for employment on the road L. of C. from Geiranger to your forces South of Dombås.

(c) Making similar arrangements at Sundalen.

(a), (b) and (c) above are in order of priority. Brigadier Hogg will be operationally under your orders.

5. On arrival in Norway you will assume command of all British troops in the Country, other than those operating under the orders of Major General Carton De Wiart based on Namsos and those in the Narvik area.

6. Your task will be to co-operate with the Norwegian Army in preventing the Northward advance of the German army based on Southern Norway.

7. It will be necessary for you to safeguard your left and rear against attack by the German forces in Trondheim and parachute-landed detachments on your L. of C.

8. You should make the earliest possible contact with the Commander-in-Chief, Norwegian Army, with a view to obtaining close co-operation towards the fulfilment of your task and the safeguarding of your forces and your communications.

You will not be under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, Norwegian Army.

9. You should report your situation and your requirements at frequent intervals and all information that you are able to obtain.

Your channels of communication are laid down in the Outline Plan and first Maintenance project (G.S. (P) No. 650).

(Sgd.) H. R. S. MASSY,
Lieutenant General,
Commander, 5th Corps.

APPENDIX B.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR LIEUTENANT-GENERAL H. R. S. MASSY, D.S.O., M.C.

1. His Majesty's Government have placed you in command of all British and French troops operating in Central Scandinavia, excluding any which may be operating in the Narvik area or based on Narvik. These latter will continue to be commanded by Major-General Mackesy under the orders of Lord Cork and Orrery.

2. The policy of His Majesty's Government is ultimately to evacuate Central Norway.

3. Your object, therefore, will be to evacuate your troops from Central Norway.

His Majesty's Government do not wish to impose any delay upon your operations which would be inconsistent with the military security of your force. They hope, however, that it will be militarily possible to postpone evacuation until after the capture of Narvik.

4. The final decision as to when the evacuation ought to take place rests with you. The final withdrawal and re-embarkation, however, is a joint operation, for which Admiral..... is appointed Naval Commander and Air Marshal..... Air Commander. The actual dates, times and places are the joint responsibility of yourself, the Naval Commander and the Air Commander.

5. You are authorised, in conjunction with the Naval and Air Commanders, to plan and carry out any combined operation which you jointly consider necessary for the achievement of your object.

6. A list of the Allied forces which are already operating in Central Norway is given in Annexure 1.

You are already familiar with the roles of these forces.

7. A list of reinforcements which have not yet been despatched from the U.K. but which are at your disposal, is attached.* In addition, His Majesty's Government are prepared to withdraw from France the remainder of the 5th Division, should you require it.

8. You will act in co-operation with, but not under the command of, the Commander-in-Chief, Norwegian forces.

Should the Norwegian Commander-in-Chief wish to evacuate any part of the Norwegian forces in conjunction with your force, you should include their evacuation in your plan. You are at liberty, however, to insist that a condition of such evacuation should be that the Norwegian Commander-in-Chief should place any force to be withdrawn under your command.

9. Should you become a casualty or otherwise be prevented from exercising command of your force, command will pass to the next senior British Officer, who will exercise command and, in the event of a French General Officer being with the force, assume the acting rank of Lieutenant-General until another British Officer can be appointed.

10. In order to ensure secrecy, you will restrict knowledge of your object to those officers who must know it for the proper execution of your plan.

(Sd.) J. G. DILL, General,
for S. of S.

War Office,
27th April, 1940.

ANNEXURE 1.

DETAIL OF THE ALLIED FORCES WHICH ARE ALREADY OPERATING IN OR EN ROUTE TO CENTRAL NORWAY.

MAURICE.—Commander Lt.-Gen. Carton de Wiart.

| Unit | Remarks |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Force Headquarters | ... Due to arrive 27/28. Adv. H.Q. arrived. |
| H.Q. 146 Inf. Bde.—Brig. Phillips. | ... Arrived. |
| 4th Lincolns | ... Arrived. |
| 1/4th K.O.Y.L.I. | ... Arrived. |
| Hallams | ... Arrived. |

Artillery.

| | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 193 A.A. Battery (of 82 A.A. Regt. 3.7"). | Due 29th. |
| (vehicles sail 27th). | |
| 166 Lt. A.A. Battery | ... Due 27th (personnel arrived). |
| (vehicles of 166 Lt. A.A. Bty.). | Sail 27th. Due about 1st May. |

Engineers.

| | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| H.Q. R.E. 61 Division | ... Not yet started. |
| Section 55 Field Coy. | ... Arrived. |

Medical.

| | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 158 Field Ambulance (16 motor ambulances). | ... Due about 1st May. |
| 147 Field Ambulance | ... Due from Narvik for 146 Inf. Bde. |

* This appendix was not received.

French Contingent.

| | |
|---|--------------|
| 5th Demi Brigade Chasseurs Alpins (Three Battalions). | Arrived. |
| 1013th and 1014th Light A.A. Batteries. (12 guns). | Arrived. |
| One Section Engineers | ... Arrived. |

SICKLE.—Commander Maj.-Gen. Paget.

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Force Headquarters | ... Arrived. |
| H.Q. 15 Inf. Bde. | ... Arrived. |
| 1 Green Howards | ... Arrived. |
| 1 K.O.Y.L.I. | ... Arrived. |
| 1 Y. & L. | ... Arrived. |
| 15 Inf. Bde. Anti-Tk. Coy. | Arrived. |
| H.Q. 148 Inf. Bde. | ... Arrived. |
| 1/5 Leicesters | ... Arrived. Reduced to a composite battalion. |
| 8 Foresters | ... Arrived. Reduced to a composite battalion. |

Artillery.

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 51 Field Regt. Less 1 Bty. | Due to arrive 28/29. |
| 71 Field Regiment | ... Not yet embarked. |
| H.Q. 56 Lt. A.A. Regiment | Ready to embark 6th May. |
| 167 Light A.A. Battery | Ready to embark 6th May. |
| 168 Light A.A. Battery | Arrival complete 25/26. |
| 260 A.A. Battery (3") | ... Arrived. |
| 82 A.A. Regiment (less 1 Bty.). | Ready to embark 28th. |
| One Bty., 58 Anti-Tk. Rept. | Due to arrive 27/28 |

Engineers.

| | |
|--------------------------------|----------|
| 55 Field Coy. (less 1 section) | Arrived. |
|--------------------------------|----------|

Medical.

| | |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| 146 Field Ambulance | ... Arrived. |
| 189 Field Ambulance | ... Due 28/29. |
| Drivers of 189 Field Amb. | Due 28/29. |

L. of C. Troops.

| | |
|------------------------|------------------|
| 687 Artizan Works Coy. | Not yet started. |
| R.E. | |

COPY.

ADDENDUM NO. 1 TO INSTRUCTIONS FOR LT. GENERAL H. R. S. MASSY, D.S.O., M.C.

1. Certain independent companies are being formed, and will come under your orders. It is the intention that they should operate in the area between exclusive Mosjoen and inclusive Bodö.

2. In addition, arrangements should be made to withdraw part of the French detachment in Maurice Force along the road and railway to Mosjoen.

3. The role of the above detachments will be:—

- (a) To prevent the enemy seizing key positions with parachute troops.
- (b) To delay the enemy's advance by land by every means, particularly demolitions.

4. These detachments should be self-contained for as long as possible. You should make arrangements for their subsequent maintenance by sea.

APPENDIX C.

INSTRUCTION TO MAJOR-GENERAL CARTON DE WIART COMMANDING FORCES SCHEDULED FOR "MAURICE" OPERATION.

1. His Majesty's Government and the Government of the French Republic have decided to land an expedition in Central Norway with the object of

- (a) Providing encouragement for the Norwegian Government.
- (b) Forming a rallying point for the Norwegian Government and armed forces.
- (c) Securing a base for any subsequent operations in Scandinavia.

This operation will be carried out concurrently with but independent of the operations already initiated in Northern Norway.

2. You are appointed to command the Allied forces which are being despatched to Central Norway.

3. Your role will be to secure the Trondheim Area.

Subsequently you should take such steps as are possible to secure the use to the Allies of the road and rail communications leading from Trondheim, especially to the east.

4. *Points of Landing.*

(i) It is suggested, but of this you, together with the S.N.O., must be the final judges, that the initial landing should be in the Namsos area, and should be carried out by Morgan's and Phillips' Brigades.

(ii) A second landing should be carried out about Trondheim preferably to the east of the town, and after the Navy has cleared the Fjord of German vessels, by 147th Inf. Bde. and Chasseurs Alpins.

(iii) Administrative facilities should initially be developed about Namsos until Trondheim has been secured.

5. A forecast of the dates of arrival in the Trondheim-Namsos area of the elements of your force is as follows:—

(a) 146th Inf. Bde., Brigadier Phillips, available on 15th April.

(b) One infantry brigade (less one battalion), under Brigadier Morgan, should be available about dawn 17th April.

(c) 147th Inf. Bde., with artillery and ancillary troops, should be available on 20th or 21st April.

(d) Two battalions Chasseurs Alpins available (in same area) 18th April.

6. Should you become a casualty or otherwise be prevented from exercising command of the force, command will pass to the next senior British officer, who will exercise command, and in the event of a French General Officer being with the force, assume the acting rank of Major-General until another British officer can be appointed.

7. As soon as you are established ashore you will get in touch with any Norwegian forces in your vicinity, inform them of the impending arrival of further Allied forces and secure their co-operation in action against any German forces.

8. The Royal Navy are making preliminary landings in the Namsos area with landing parties about 300 strong in all and it is their intention to seize and hold any point in the Namsos area at which your disembarkation might take place.

9. Your force is not organised for a landing in face of opposition, and it is not intended that you should undertake such an operation.

10. During the voyage and during landing operations, the senior naval officer will be in command, and he will decide, in co-operation with you, where and when to land.

11. A note as to the strength of the Norwegian forces in the area, and of the strength of any German forces operating in the vicinity is being given to you separately.

12. Your force will constitute an independent command directly under the War Office. You will keep a constant communication with the War Office and report as regularly as is practicable as to the situation.

(sd.) EDMUND IRONSIDE,
C.I.G.S.

The War Office,
14th April, 1940.

LONDON

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