

Troops were at once directed not to advance East of the line reached by them at the time when hostilities ceased, and certain parties of Germans taken prisoner after that hour were returned to the enemy. Outposts were established along this line both for the sake of military security and in order to prevent all possibility of fraternisation. Behind these outposts the remainder of our forces were grouped and concentrated.

It was arranged that the forward movement of the different Allied Armies should be carried out by certain definite stages, through separate zones of action. The zone allotted to the British Armies extended from the front then held by us in an easterly direction as far as the German frontier, whence it continued in a North-easterly direction to the Cologne Bridgehead. The boundaries of this zone and the stages of the advance are shown on the attached map.*

In order to permit the enemy to withdraw his troops from the area immediately in front of us, our positions were maintained unchanged until the morning of the 17th November. Thereafter, to avoid all possibility of collision between the opposing forces, the movement of troops towards the frontier was regulated so as to preserve a safety zone of 10 kilometres in depth between our advanced detachments and the enemy's rearguards.

The general advance into Germany was directed to begin on the 1st December. On the 12th December, French, American and British forces would cross the Rhine at Mayence, Coblenz and Cologne, and commence the occupation of bridgeheads having a radius of 30 kilometres from the crossings at those towns. By that date, the enemy was bound by the terms of the armistice to have withdrawn his military forces a distance of 10 kilometres from the right bank of the Rhine and from the perimeter of the Rhine bridgeheads.

Re-adjustment of the British Forces.

(2) As we progressed eastwards, the front held by the British Armies, already short, would automatically be decreased. On the other hand, the maintenance of supply across and beyond the battle areas presented difficulties which would grow rapidly as our communications lengthened. These two considerations made it both feasible and necessary to effect a redistribution of troops, so that the extent of the forces advancing into Germany should be no more than was absolutely necessary to meet military requirements.

I decided that the opening stages of our advance should be carried out by the Second and Fourth Armies, under command of the two senior Army Commanders General Plumer and General Rawlinson, and that each Army should consist of four Corps each of four divisions. To ensure rapidity of movement and to facilitate supply, the artillery and auxiliary arms and services accompanying these Armies were cut down to a minimum, and all surplus units then attached to them were transferred to the First, Third and Fifth Armies. Arrangements were made for reorganising these last mentioned Armies and for withdrawing them to areas farther West.

The Advance to the German Frontier.

(3) At 05.00 on the morning of the 17th November the 2nd Cavalry Division covering

the front of the Fourth Army, and the 1st and 3rd Cavalry Divisions covering the front of the Second Army crossed the line reached on the 11th November and commenced the march to the German Frontier. The leading infantry divisions moved forward on the following day.

The advance was carried out under active service conditions, cavalry leading and all military precautions being taken. Among all arms, the general bearing, smartness and march discipline of the troops were of a high order, reflecting credit on the Army and the nation. All traces of the desperate fighting and forced marches of the previous months had been removed, and men, horses, guns and vehicles appeared as though turned out for parade. Throughout the advance, despite long distances covered under difficult conditions, indifferent billets and the absence of the usual opportunities for bathing or renewing clothes, the same general standard of excellence was maintained in a remarkable degree.

The first troops to complete the portion of our advance which lay through Belgium were patrols of the 2nd Cavalry Division, who arrived on the German frontier in the neighbourhood of Beho on the night of the 28/29th November. Next day the frontier was reached by the 1st Cavalry Division along the whole front of our advance. The infantry, who had been marching steadily in rear of the cavalry, closed up behind them in readiness for the advance into Germany.

During this part of our march the various stages above referred to were strictly observed, except that in front of our general advance detachments of cavalry had been sent forward to keep order in Charleroi and Namur in response to requests received from the local authorities. Everywhere our troops were received with the utmost enthusiasm by the population of the liberated districts.

In every town and village streets were festooned with flags and spanned by triumphal arches bearing messages of welcome. Men, women and children thronged to meet our troops and exchange greetings in French and English. Nor was their gratitude confined to demonstrations such as these. Wherever our men were billeted during their advance everything possible was done for their comfort. In many cases refreshment was pressed upon them without payment and on all sides despite the shortage of food from which the occupied districts of Belgium had long suffered, the generosity of the civil population found means to supplement the rations of our troops.

During this period large numbers of released prisoners of war, French and British, came through our lines and were passed back to collecting stations. The enemy seems to have liberated the majority of the Allied prisoners west of the Rhine without making any provision for their feeding and conveyance. The result was that much unnecessary suffering was caused to these unfortunate individuals, while a not inconsiderable additional burden was placed upon our own transport and supplies.

Supply Difficulties.

(4) Throughout the whole of the advance, and especially in the stage which followed the crossing of the German frontier, very great, but unavoidable, difficulties were encountered in connection with supply.

At the time of the armistice railheads were on the general line Le Cateau, Valenciennes,

* Not reproduced.