

the Belgian Government were wedded. The French authorities were never in a position to obtain reliable and accurate details of the plans of the Belgian General Staff for the defence of their country in the event of an invasion by Germany; staff conversations were out of the question, yet plans had to be framed in such a way that they could be put into instant operation in the event of Belgium asking for military assistance from France or Great Britain when invasion had taken place or was imminent.

Such slender contact as existed between the British and Belgian Military authorities was maintained through the Military Attaché at His Majesty's Embassy at Brussels and General Van Overstraeten, Military Adviser to the King of the Belgians.

15. Three alternative plans were decided on by the French High Command during October and November 1939, and I had agreed with General Georges on the part to be played in each of them by the B.E.F.

The first alternative was to occupy the frontier defences, pushing forward mobile troops to the line of the Escaut, while the French 7th Army on my left were to delay the enemy on the line of the Messines Ridge and the Yser Canal. This plan was soon discarded in favour of the second alternative, which was to secure and hold the line of the Escaut itself, from the point at which it crosses the frontier at Maulde northwards to the neighbourhood of Ghent where it was intended to effect a junction with Belgian forces.

Later, however, as information became available regarding the defences of the Belgian Army, and its readiness for war, the French High Command formed the opinion that it would be safe to count on the Belgian defence holding out for some days on the Eastern frontier, and the Albert Canal. It was also ascertained that the Belgians were preparing a *de Coiniet* anti-tank obstacle running southwards from Wavre towards Namur.

The line of the river Dyle was from the military point of view a better one than that of the Escaut. It was shorter, it afforded greater depth and its northern portion was inundated. In addition, it represented smaller enemy occupation of Belgian territory.

On the other hand, it involved the B.E.F. in a forward move of some sixty miles against time, while it also necessitated the holding by the French on our right of the Gembloux gap which contains no natural anti-tank obstacle. This plan was twice discussed by General Georges with me on 13th October at my headquarters at Le Cauroy and again on 16th November at Folembay the headquarters of the French First Group of Armies; on this occasion there were also present General Billotte, who commanded the Army Group, and Generals Blanchard and Corap, Commanding the French 1st and 9th Armies. At this conference it was agreed that the frontage of the B.E.F. on the Dyle position was to be from Wavre to Louvain, both places inclusive, and a formal instruction to this effect was issued to me by General Georges on the following day. From this time onward, Commanders and Staffs were studying simultaneously two alternative plans for advances to the Dyle or the Escaut; these became known as plans D and E.

Both these plans were worked out in the greatest detail, and orders and instructions kept up to date as new divisions arrived and the role of divisions changed.

The Escaut plan was by far the simpler of the two; it involved sending armoured car reconnaissances to the river Dendre to be relieved by divisional cavalry, who were later, if necessary, to fight a delaying action backwards to the Escaut; demolitions were provided for on both rivers; for the remainder of the force, however, the advance appeared likely to be an easy one, well within a day's march on foot. The Dyle plan, on the other hand, involved an advance of some sixty miles, carried out at a time when every moment was of value over roads not previously reconnoitred, perhaps crowded with refugees moving counter to the allied armies. Much, too, depended on the resistance which the Belgians, and perhaps the Dutch, were able to offer to the enemy, who at such a time would certainly be making every effort to pierce the line of the Meuse and the Albert Canal.

16. The plans made in advance for the advance to the Dyle position actually worked to schedule in almost all respects. It may therefore be convenient to summarise them here.

The Allied forces were to advance to the line Namur—Wavre—Louvain—Antwerp, of which the B.E.F. Sector extended from Wavre to Louvain, both inclusive. On our right was to be the French 1st Army (Général d'Armée Blanchard) under whose command was the French Cavalry Corps, and whose task it was to delay the arrival of the enemy on the Dyle position and to block with its main forces the Gembloux gap, with the Cavalry Corps pushed forward to the line Eghezee (8 miles north of Namur)—Tirlemont. On our left the French 7th Army (Général d'Armée Giraud) was to advance to the general area Antwerp—Ghent, with the object of supporting Belgian resistance north of Louvain. The plans of this Army included a possible advance into Holland as far as the line Turnhout—Breda, and this was actually carried out. It had been ascertained that a portion of the Belgian Army, if forced to withdraw from their frontier defences would come into line on the left of the B.E.F. on the general line from Louvain exclusive, thence northward to the fortified area of Antwerp, known as the National Redoubt.

The British front was to be occupied initially with 1st Corps (Lieutenant-General M. G. H. Barker, who had recently taken over command from General Sir John Dill), on a two-division front, on the right, and 2nd Corps (Lieutenant-General A. F. Brooke, now Sir Alan Brooke) on the left, on a front initially of one division.

The advance was to be made in four periods. In the first, 12th Royal Lancers (Armoured Cars) were to move to a general line some eight miles beyond the Dyle in observation of the approaches from the east; they were to be relieved by cavalry regiments of 1st and 2nd Corps when they arrived.

Behind them were to come, from right to left, 2nd Division (Major-General H. C. Loyd) and 1st Division (Major-General Hon. H. R. L. G. Alexander) of 1st Corps, and 3rd Division (Major-General B. L. Montgomery) of 2nd Corps. The whole of the move of these three divisions was to be made by motor transport,