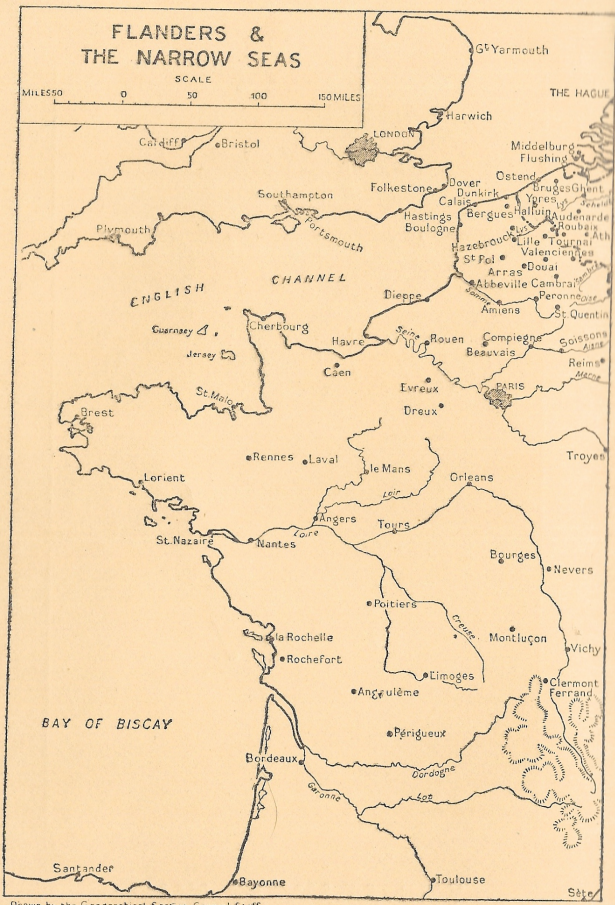




***THE  
BATTLE OF  
FLANDERS***

**Ian Hay**

**THE ARMY AT WAR**



# THE BATTLE OF FLANDERS 1940

IAN HAY

LONDON  
HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

## CHAPTER I

## FLANDERS ONCE MORE

## I

*The Move Overseas*

WAR MUST ALWAYS provoke comparison with its immediate predecessor. There must have been many of us in September, 1939, whose memories turned back to those fateful weeks in August, 1914, when the British Expeditionary Force, thanks to perfect co-operation between our naval and military staffs, were conveyed swiftly and securely across the Channel, without the loss of a man, to immediate participation in the Battle of Mons.

Could that feat be repeated, we asked, under modern conditions?

It could, and was, despite new and unfamiliar difficulties.

Two of these were outstanding. The first was the possibility—the certainty, it seemed—of an overwhelming attack upon our transports from the air. The second was the fact that animals had been totally replaced by mechanical vehicles, and this presented a new and, quite literally, most weighty problem in transportation.

In the first case the most pressing essential was secrecy, and this had been successfully maintained for many weeks, while detailed and complex plans were prepared and carried out in peacetime. The agencies concerned were the War Office, the Admiralty, the Board of Trade, and the French Naval, Military and Civil authorities, working together in silent efficiency and loyal accord.

Further security was ensured by the selection of landing ports as remote as possible from the German air-bases. Calais and Boulogne were held to be out of the question this time, so Cherbourg was selected as a landing place for the troops, and Brest, Nantes, and St. Nazaire for their stores and vehicles. Nantes stands some thirty-five miles up the estuary of the Loire; St. Nazaire, at its mouth in the Bay of Biscay, was converted during the last war from a modest coastal village into a

considerable landing-port and base for the use of the American Expeditionary Force; so suited our purpose well.

So well in hand were our preparations in September, 1939, that within a week of the outbreak of war these ports were ready for the reception of the British Expeditionary Force. Advance units were on the spot even earlier, to organise docking and transportation arrangements. These units were in the main recruited from the port authorities in Great Britain, and most efficient they proved themselves.

Anti-aircraft defences and hospital accommodation had also to be provided, for we had good reason to expect that disembarkation might have to take place under intensive interference from enemy bombers.

So expeditiously were all these preliminary tasks performed that the move of the Expeditionary Force as a whole to France was able to begin upon 10th September, one week after the declaration of war. They arrived safely on schedule time.

"Drivers and vehicles," we are told, "were on the road for long periods, but their duty was lightened by the hospitality of the French inhabitants, which all ranks will recall with gratitude". There is a pleasantly familiar ring about that statement.

Upon the 13th September Lord Gort himself, as Commander-in-Chief, left the War Office for Camberley, where his General Headquarters was forming, and upon the following day followed his men overseas. He sailed in H.M.S. "Skate", and was accompanied by Lt. General Sir John Dill, Commander of the 1st Corps, and his own personal staff. Upon landing at Cherbourg he proceeded by car to the Chateau de la Blanchardière, Le Mans, which had been placed at his disposal by the French Government.

## II

### *The New Factor*

IN ONE RESPECT THE NEWLY arrived B.E.F. enjoyed an advantage denied to its predecessor of 1914: it had ample time to assemble and reorganise after disembarkation; whereas twenty-four years earlier our troops had been hurried into action as they set foot upon the soil of France.

Perhaps this was just as well, for the Staff now encountered a problem destined hereafter to add considerably to the difficulties of communication—a problem arising from the necessity of *dispersion*.

As we all know to our cost, the bombing aeroplane has completely revolutionised not only the operational but the administrative side of war; and with it, what may be called the recreational or social side.

In the last war troops were either in action or back at rest; and when they were back at rest they really rested. Thousands of middle-aged and elderly Britons can recall to-day grateful memories of pleasant billets in Bethune, or Bailleul, or Arras, or of innumerable friendly villages and farm-houses scattered behind the line, where exhausted units could make good their deficiencies and recruit their energy. But to-day all that is gone. There are no real rest areas anywhere. Troops can no longer congregate in centres of population; they must be dispersed in small contingents all over the countryside, separated from their nearest neighbours by a mile or so of field and plough, wrapped by night in an impenetrable black-out.

The same restrictions are imposed upon the activities of the Staff, for in the case of G.H.Q., the brain and directing force of the whole Army, it is obviously unsafe to keep all your eggs in one basket. When G.H.Q. established itself at Arras, it was found advisable to quarter the Commander-in-Chief and his principal Staff Officers each in separate billets some miles apart. This meant that whenever a conference had to be held, valuable time was taken up in travelling, or in a struggle with that most exasperating of instruments, the field telephone.

This handicap of enforced dispersion made itself felt from the very beginning. Laval and Le Mans were fifty miles apart, and the base ports three times that distance. Despite the cordial help of the French authorities, telephonic communication never proved satisfactory, quite apart from the danger of a breach of security involved. It was found by Commanders and Staff that satisfactory control could only be ensured by personal visits. All this meant a further waste of time on the road.

Dispersion of vehicles and transport in general also involved a loss of time in their assembly—and in war, time is frequently the supreme factor.

These handicaps were not of course insuperable, neither were they suffered by the B.E.F. alone. They were imposed impartially upon both sides by modern conditions of warfare. Moreover, the months of comparative tranquility which followed gave to our young and inexperienced Army breathing space in which to accustom itself to its new problems.

## III

### *The British Sector*

BY 21ST SEPTEMBER the concentration of the General Headquarters Staff and of the essential Lines of Communication units was accomplished. Next day the troops themselves began to arrive—units of 1st Corps. On

22nd September Lord Gort left Le Mans for Amiens. At Mantes-sur-Seine he was handed a telegram from General Georges, Commander of the French Front of the North East, indicating the location and extent of frontage which it was desired that the British Expeditionary Force should take over.

Lord Gort, it should be noted, was acting under the direct control of General Georges, while General Georges himself served under General Gamelin, in supreme command of the Allied Forces in France.

After a reconnaissance of the allotted sector, Lord Gort visited General Georges at Grand Quartier General upon 26th September, accompanied by his Chief of the General Staff, Lt.-General H. R. Pownall. He agreed to take over the sector proposed, which followed the Belgian frontier for some fifty-five miles, beginning at Maulde on the right and running roughly northward to Halluin (immediately south of Menin on the Lille-Menin road), turning thence in a southwesterly direction along the River Lys—a name familiar to many a British soldier of the last war—as far as even more familiar Armentières. Within the salient formed, and protected by it, lay Roubaix, Tourcoing and the great city of Lille.

As the British Expeditionary Force only consisted so far of four Divisions, a French Division, the 51st, was included in Lord Gort's command.

At General Georges' express desire, Lord Gort did not wait for the arrival of his entire present Force in its concentration area, but agreed to move 1st Corps into the line without delay, in the sector running north from Maulde. They were to be in position by 5th October, and General Georges was informed that 2nd Corps would join them a week later.

#### IV

##### *A Great Troop Movement*

NOW CAME THE TASK of moving 1st Corps from its assembly area to the Belgian frontier, a distance of no less than two hundred and fifty miles.

Tanks, tracked vehicles, and slow-moving artillery were despatched by train; the remainder of the Force proceeded by three parallel routes. Three days were allotted for the move of each formation. Two "Staging areas" were arranged on each road, south of the Somme and Seine respectively. Anti-aircraft protection was provided at each crossing—another pregnant sign of the times.

It will be interesting for a moment to examine the composition of this vast and novel cavalcade. ("Cavalcade" is a misnomer in itself, for there were no horses in the British Expeditionary Force of 1939-40, except some transport animals brought later from India.) Five hundred vehicles moved daily over each stage of the route, maintaining a prudent interval of one hundred yards between vehicles. The first stage was one hundred and twenty miles, and a halt of one day was made at the end of it for purposes of maintenance and overhaul. It was found that the vehicles had stood up well, and breakdowns were few.

However, various valuable lessons were learnt. The drivers became accustomed to the novel sensation of keeping to the right-hand side of the road. A French-speaking British officer, acting in liaison with the French road authorities, proved of great value. The advisability, too, was driven home of early reconnaissance of staging-areas, and of control at the dispersal points.

Upon 3rd October, the agreed date, after "the largest road movement ever undertaken with motor transport by any British Army," 1st Corps took over from the French the sector Maulde-Grison on the Belgian frontier. This sector lay between that of the 1st French Army and 16th French Corps.

Our own 1st Corps consisted at this time of the 1st Division (Major General the Hon. H. R. L. G. Alexander) who occupied the left of the sector, and the 2nd (Major General H. C. Loyd) who occupied the right.

Lord Gort himself established his headquarters in familiar and friendly surroundings at Arras—or rather, once again in deference to the need of dispersion, at a château in the tiny village of Habarcq, eight miles west—upon 2nd October.

On 12th October, as previously undertaken, 2nd Corps began to arrive from Le Mans, and the 3rd Division (Major General B. L. Montgomery) moved into the line between Bouvines and Lannoy. The 4th Division (Major General D. G. Johnson, V.C.) was located in General Headquarters reserve.

1st and 2nd Corps having thus punctually arrived at their allotted positions, embarked upon their duties at once.

These proved to be no sinecure, consisting as they did of helping in the construction of the elaborate defensive works designed to protect the frontier of France from the northern end of the Maginot Line to the North Sea.

In this connexion the French High Command have been criticised as having been too "Maginot minded". Still, it is possible to organise a

strong defensive scheme without entirely eliminating the intention to attack. In any case it is reasonable to suppose that if the Maginot Line and the Belgian Frontier defences had ever been given the opportunity, as a completed and occupied whole, to serve the purpose for which they had been designed, the history of 1940 might have been written differently. But—in the grammar of war conditional sentences have no status.

## V

*In the Line*

THE ESSENTIAL FEATURE of modern defence is defence in depth, with special provision of effective tank obstacles.

Such an obstacle was already in existence when 1st Corps took over. It consisted of an almost continuous ditch, covered by concrete block-houses built to accommodate anti-tank and machine guns. By previous arrangement, certain French technical troops continued to work in the sector under the command of the French Commander of the Defensive Sector of Lille, Colonel Bertschi.

But of course these works were a mere beginning. It was decided to organise three main defence positions—namely, the existing frontier position, a Corps reserve position extending across the base of the Lille salient, and further in rear a position following the line of the Haute-Deule, Sensée-La Bassée Canals.

This involved the construction of an elaborate system of field defences, including "pill-boxes", to afford protection to those weapons which formed the backbone of fire-defence throughout the whole depth of the positions. To save time, these pill-boxes were so standardised as to accommodate both British and French weapons.

Here then was work in plenty for all, and of a most intensive character, for none could know how much time was available. Work upon the pill-boxes was immediately begun by the Royal Engineers, assisted by other arms. In addition, a specially constituted force composed of twelve field companies of the Royal Engineers (drawn from Territorial Army Divisions at home) known as X Force, arrived early in November, accompanied by certain sturdy companies of the recently established Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps.

It was a hard winter. The weather in October and November was wet and stormy, and work later on was delayed by a long series of frosts. But by the end of January the position had been developed to a considerable depth—pill-boxes completed, wire erected, and many miles of anti-tank ditches dug.

## VI

*The Saar Detachment*

ALL THIS TIME OUR TROOPS had been employed in the main upon purely manual labour, many miles from the theatre of hostilities. Obviously such employment, however necessary, is not calculated to inculcate in the soldier either mental alertness or a fighting spirit.

It was therefore agreed between Lord Gort and General Georges that in order to give the British Force, so far as was possible, some preliminary experience of actual contact with the enemy, British troops should be transferred to the Saar front and permanently maintained there in rotation, to the strength of an Infantry Brigade, under the command of a French Division.

Accordingly, upon 4th December, such a Brigade took over a sector from the French 42nd Division. Here the fortifications of the Maginot Line, manned of course by French troops, were situated to rearward of them; the enemy positions lay on an average some fifteen hundred yards from our foremost posts. Our battalions were, as usual, arranged in depth.

Here was ample manoeuvring and patrolling ground, and full advantage was taken of the opportunities which it offered. Raids between our own troops and those of the enemy began immediately, and increased in intensity with varying fortune on either side, and many important and at times salutary lessons were learned by our young soldiers.

"Since that date" (4th December) says Lord Gort in his first despatch dealing with events before the opening of the great battle, "infantry brigades of the British Expeditionary Force have successively completed short tours of duty in the sector, and junior leaders have thus had valuable training, in their day to day duties, when in contact with the enemy."

Incidentally, it is in the description of these operations that mention is first made of that extremely useful weapon the Tommy gun—more respectfully described here, however, as the sub-machine gun.

It will be appropriate to add in this connexion that the Saar front Infantry Brigade ultimately grew into a Division, complete with attached troops, including cavalry, machine guns, and pioneers. (The term cavalry, here and hereafter, must be understood to denote armoured fighting vehicles.) Our 51st Division was selected for this purpose, and upon 7th May relieved the 7th French Division on a front of 12,000 yards, from Guerstling to Remeling.

This Division, as we shall see, was destined not to return to Lord Gort's direct control, nor to take part in the operations with which this narrative is concerned.

## VII

*The B.E.F. grows*

BUT WE HAVE BEEN anticipating a little. Let us return to our dispositions along the Belgian frontier.

So far 1st and 2nd Corps had consisted of two Divisions each, the 1st and 2nd, and 3rd and 4th respectively. Additional units arrived during October and November, including elements of the 5th and 6th Divisions, in the form of the 15th and 17th Infantry Brigades. Lord Gort was now able to complete the 5th Division (Major General H. E. Franklyn), and presently it became possible to man the British sector entirely with British troops. Accordingly the French 51st Division and the British Expeditionary Force dissolved partnership, with many expressions of friendly regret, upon 1st December, 1939.

The arrival of the 48th Division (Major General A. F. A. N. Thorne) in January completed the establishment of the first contingent of the British Expeditionary Force, which now consisted of two corps of three divisions each, with corps and army troops.

At the end of January the strength of the Force stood at 222,200 of all ranks, not including the Air Component and other units of the Royal Air Force for whose maintenance the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force was responsible.

## VIII

*The Air*

IN MODERN WARFARE operations by land and in the air must be closely co-ordinated, whether for attack or defence. For this reason the British Expeditionary Force included a Component (to employ the accepted term) of the Royal Air Force, under Air Vice Marshal C. H. B. Blount. This at first consisted of two Army Co-operation Wings, one Fighter Wing, and one Bomber Reconnaissance Wing. These aircraft were flown out to France at the outbreak of war, and came under Lord Gort's command from the dates of the disembarkation of their ground units. Other units were added later.

Anti-aircraft units, too, were early on the scene, having been disembarked at the base ports on 14th and 15th September, in conjunction with fighter units of the Royal Air Force, in order to protect the landing

and forward moves of 1st and 2nd Corps. Thereafter our available anti-aircraft resources were divided between forward defences and Lines of Communication. A searchlight zone was also established, as a protection against enemy night bombing.

Until the necessary aerodromes could be constructed, the Royal Air Force was largely dependent for accommodation upon French hospitality. This, needless to say, was freely forthcoming, together with every other kind of help, as is gratefully acknowledged in the Despatch.

As for the aerodromes themselves, it had already been decided that all aerodromes used by the Royal Air Force in France should be constructed and maintained by the British Expeditionary Force, together with their signal communications. It was soon evident that the magnitude of this task had been underestimated. There is little firm turf in France, and concrete runways were found to be indispensable in most areas. Special units of the Royal Engineers had therefore to be raised to construct these.

The actual duties of the Royal Air Force during this long period of waiting and preparation were confined for the most part to air reconnaissance, upon a strategical plan worked out in conjunction with our own Air Ministry and General Monchard, commanding the Air Forces with the French Armies of the North East. The work was extremely arduous, for owing to our scrupulous observance of international law, our aircraft never flew over neutral territory, and this involved them in very long detours, usually at a great height and in the face of enemy opposition.

"But," says Lord Gort, "this rigorous duty has been boldly and cheerfully undertaken. Much photography has been undertaken with useful results, both in information obtained and in experience gained of photographic and survey methods."

He was right. Certainly this period of semi-activity was furnishing our young men, whether on the ground or in the air, with an invaluable opportunity to educate themselves for the stern tests which lay ahead of them.

## IX

*Problems of Administration*

EVERY WAR PRODUCES its own perplexities, and Lord Gort soon found himself confronted with problems some of which had not been foreseen, while the seriousness of others had been underestimated.

The outstanding difficulty was that of Security—of maintaining the necessary secrecy regarding our strength and dispositions.

The great Duke of Wellington once said that victory in battle lies with the leader who can guess correctly what is going on upon the other side

of the hill. But to-day no guessing is required. Not only is the other side of the hill open to inspection, but the whole face of nature. The slightest troop movement or concentration can be detected from the air and immediately communicated by wireless to the parties most interested. More than that; where modern telegraph systems are concerned, the longest way round is frequently the shortest way home. At any moment some indiscreet item of news may slip past the censor, cross the Atlantic, be published in New York, and recabled to Germany an hour later.

In our case there was no need for information of interest to the enemy to follow any such circuitous route. In the autumn of 1939 thousands of Belgians were working upon the beet-harvest of Northern France, right in the British zone, and an average of at least twenty thousand local inhabitants crossed and recrossed the frontier daily, upon their more or less lawful occasions.

It was obviously impossible to keep tally of this mixed multitude, especially since the French frontier control officials had been seriously reduced in numbers upon mobilisation. Those available, together with our Field Security Police, did their best, a very efficient best; but it was manifestly impossible to stop all leaks.

In modern warfare too, especially during periods of comparative inaction, the postal censorship must keep its eyes wide open. This was particularly necessary in the British zone during the winter of 1939-40, for Thomas Atkins, incited thereto perhaps by the tranquil and somewhat monotonous surroundings in which he found himself, developed a passion for correspondence on a scale which had not been entirely foreseen. In view of the abnormally large numbers of letters despatched daily it was found necessary to make a considerable increase in the censorship personnel.

## X

*The Rearward Areas*

DESPITE THE LACK of immediate active operations, the British Expeditionary Force, as we have seen, was kept busy enough during these winter months. Not only had every effort to be made to render the northern defences secure, but long-term plans had to be put into execution for the accommodating and training of future contingents.

Here it was found necessary to enlarge upon the original plan. Maintenance depôts had already been established at Brest and Nantes; but in view of the extreme length of our lines of communication it soon became apparent that an advanced base must be established. Havre was selected,

and Field Supply Depôts were set up further forward. By mid-December the staff of the Movement Control were operating some ninety stations, while fourteen ports were in active use. Through these ports passed a quarter of a million men, forty-five thousand mechanical vehicles, and a monthly tonnage of sixty to one hundred thousand tons of stores.

Works projects were put in hand everywhere. From the bases to the forward line huts and buildings began to spring up; hospitals and reinforcement camps were put in hand, and electric power installed.

The supply of labour was a perpetual problem. French civilian labour, owing to mobilisation, was practically unobtainable, and the bulk of the work fell upon cavalry and infantry reservists. Later, the Pioneer Corps absorbed the units already in France.

All these activities were under the general control of the G.O.C. Lines of Communication Area, the late Major General P. de Fonblanque. They covered almost a third of France, stretching from Dunkirk to Brest and from Cherbourg to Marseilles.

Despite these preoccupations, the training of the Force for active operations never ceased. Thanks to the co-operation of the French Army, artillery practice camps were established and many other training facilities provided.

Eight hundred and fifty officers and men were sent home in the course of the winter as instructors, to assist in the training of the new formations, and an equal number from home were attached to the Force for instruction.

The shortage of officers was being acutely felt about this time. Four hundred candidates, mostly Warrant Officers, Class III, were recommended for immediate commissions, and another four hundred sent home for the necessary training as such.

## XI

*Telling the World*

THE NEED FOR PUBLICITY and propaganda, those most potent weapons of modern warfare, furnished a complete set of thorny problems of their own to the Director of Military Intelligence and his staff at General Headquarters. These were shared with the Department of Public Relations at the War Office.

There was urgent need, for instance, of countering German propaganda among the French troops themselves—the well-worn suggestion that while French soldiers toiled and bled in the forward line, the British Army was taking its ease in the rearward areas and diverting itself with French wives and daughters. Much was done in this direction through



the medium of the British Mission at Grand Quartier General, under Brigadier J. G. des R. Swayne, and its opposite number at our own General Headquarters, under General de Division Voruz, to whom Lord Gort pays warm tribute.

Then there was the problem of a public at home clamouring for news, and of the war-correspondent, the broadcaster, and the camera-man at General Headquarters itself.

"The significance and requirements of the press," says the Despatch, "and of press and cinematographic publicity in the field in modern war, have proved greater than was anticipated prior to the outbreak of hostilities."

It need hardly be said that the extent of these requirements had never been underestimated by the Press itself. Indeed the difficulty was to keep these requirements within reasonable bounds. Every newspaper, every broadcasting corporation, every news-reel agency—each demanded its representative at General Headquarters. Had all been permitted to come who wished, the ancient city of Arras could not have contained them—unless the Army had moved out.

Finally, and properly, the selection of accredited representatives was left to the Newspaper Proprietors Association in London, who performed their highly invidious task with tact and discretion. The B.B.C., of course, sent its own official representatives, and five news-reel companies each contributed a unit.

Correspondents disappointed of a place in the quota were subsequently brought out from home upon periodical conducted tours.

In all, some fifty-five war correspondents were permanently accredited to the British Expeditionary Force. They were divided into sections, each under military conducting-officers selected by the Department of Public Relations at the War Office, and working under a local Assistant Director of Public Relations, who was himself responsible to the Director of Military Intelligence at General Headquarters.

The American correspondents, who had been allotted a generous quota, were gratified to find themselves placed in a section of their own, and not mingled with the other "neutrals."

All concerned were naturally irked for many months by the lack of exciting operations and the perpetual demands of some of their employers for "hot news." It is strange to remember now that there was at this time a good deal of criticism in certain quarters of "this phoney war." One American correspondent indeed was heard to complain that in the

opinion of his employer the war was not being "put over at its full entertainment value."

However, these impatient scribes were destined before long to taste actual war conditions—and right gallantly they rose to the adventure.

## XII

*A Contrast*

IN GERMANY, it may be interesting but not surprising to note, they do these things differently. War correspondents, war artists, cameramen, broadcasters—all are enlisted in the Army, and serve under military discipline. They go into action carrying the tools of their trade, and when (and if) they come out, they publish their impressions to the world; or rather, they hand them to Dr. Goebbels, who edits them to his own liking and passes them on, in uniform and stereotyped form, to the German Press.

It is a convenient and businesslike method of reporting a war, but unfortunately impracticable in countries where the press is free, and variety of individual opinion is the breath of public life.

## XIII

*Unbending the Bow*

"WELFARE" IS A NEW TERM in Army language. It covers the provision of recreation, sport, entertainment and comforts, both bodily and spiritual—all the *imponderabilia*, in fact, which make the difference between inspirational and mechanical obedience—between a Damascus blade and a broomstick.

There was considerable need for these beneficent activities in the British Expeditionary Force, for its composition and outlook were different from those of its predecessors. It was a much more highly educated Force, and educated people can never find recreation in mere idleness: they require something for their minds to bite on, all the time.

Their general health had been good. Despite severe weather conditions, the number of troops in the care of medical units had never exceeded 2.8 per cent. of the strength of the Force.

First in every soldier's thoughts and hopes comes the question of leave, and by the middle of December it was found possible to declare leave

“open.” By the end of January ten days’ leave home had been enjoyed by some sixty thousand of all ranks, apart from many cases of “compassionate” leave.

Some ninety Expeditionary Force (or “Naafi”) Institutes were established along the Lines of Communication, where a soldier could purchase the small comforts of life and perhaps sit in a real chair for an hour or two. Naafi also provided concert parties and mobile cinemas. The concert parties, varying in size and ambition, were furnished from home by a body known as The Entertainments National Services Association ; or more conveniently, “Ensa.”

Some day, it is to be hoped, the story of the Ensa parties will be written in full. They gave their performances in many strange places, and stranger still were some of the adventures they encountered—none of which loses in the telling of it.

Correspondence with home, as already noted, was prodigious. As many as nine thousand bags of mail were handled on a single day by the Postal Service. A supply of free newspapers, too, was daily forthcoming, thanks to the generosity of the Newspaper Proprietors’ Association. The Continental *Daily Mail* actually published a periodical supplement devoted entirely to news of special interest to the Force. Books were available in goodly quantities, and the enterprising shop-keepers of Arras and other towns soon had quantities of assorted English literature on sale. Penguins were almost as numerous as in the Antarctic Circle.

Visits from distinguished visitors made a welcome break in routine. His Majesty the King was enthusiastically received upon December 4th. The President of the French Republic, the Prime Minister, and many other prominent and familiar figures were made welcome.

So the long period of waiting and preparation drew to its close. The Force had learned much, and endured a good deal. But it had found itself. Whatever lay before it now would be faced with full efficiency and high heart. Whatever we might lack in material, the men were all right. Lord Gort sums it up :—

“The British Army contains to-day very few regimental officers and other ranks who fought in the last war. Much that was common knowledge then must therefore be learned again. Nevertheless, events on the Saar front have proved beyond doubt that the young officer and his men, once they have had experience of active service, will be in every way worthy of their predecessors.”

Events were shortly to prove the entire truth and justice of his words.