



*"Along the road were burning vehicles."*

were burning vehicles, vehicles smashed and filled with holes, tributes to enemy marksmanship. Once we passed a small arms-ammunition truck which was blazing fiercely, its load exploding in tremendous rattles of "firing" while spent shells whined in the air and thudded into the ground round about like a heavy shower of hail.

We lost count of time as the withdrawal continued. Never have I known a day to seem so long. Without arms we medical folk—there was a bare half-dozen of us together by this time, the others having taken a different route—felt helpless, dismayed. There seemed to be nothing we could do, we had no equipment, and we had lost the unit to which we had been attached.

In the meantime, however, some of our party were doing valuable work. We heard later how they had attended seriously wounded men under the most difficult circumstances. Two of them were working in a damaged truck when enemy planes again began to machine gun the road: but they carried on efficiently throughout the attack.

Later in the afternoon we passed a nest of our own machine-gunners ready for action. They expected the enemy to attempt a breakthrough. "But," they said, "he'll have a b—— hard job." The gunners were in excellent spirits, smiling, cracking a joke or two, but grimly confident. There were tanks in the village we had left a bare half-hour before, sheltering under the protection given by our refusal to fire on civilians, they said.

Even as we passed them our artillery began pounding away at the roads beyond the village. At last we regained contact with our adopted unit. We found them digging in, preparing to make, should it be necessary, a desperate last stand which would enable the main party to escape. In a dry river-bed we found a shelter, for it seemed that all we could then do was to await events—attack when we would go into action as stretcher bearers, or the time for withdrawal to the sea.

There was no attack, however, and when the coming of darkness brought safety from the Luftwaffe the last steps in the last stage began. The danger was by no means over, however, and one unit, ours, was detailed to form a rearguard while the remainder marched back to the beach. The company with which we medicals were was set to straddle the road in reserve of the remainder of the battalion. To us it seemed rather a strange anomaly for unarmed men to be waiting there a few yards in the rear of a rifle company also waiting tensely in the darkness, weapons ready, crouched in the scant shelter of irrigation trenches and behind trees in anticipation of a possible attack.

If the day had seemed long, that night of waiting beside the road was an eternity. Company after company, group after group of men, marched past us. Hours were centuries, minutes years, as we waited, waited, waited, unable to sleep, yet fatigued beyond measure. At last our turn came, and we marched a few yards down the road to a point where it branched. Here again we waited.

Time dragged by unbearably. Groups marched away into the blackness, under the guidance of naval officers, and clearly in the silence we could hear the welcome sounds of the sea, and at long irregular intervals the rhythmic throbbing of engines. Between us and the enemy there were only the ready rifles of our own men now—that and bluff, for it seemed that not knowing what we had in store for him he dared not come on until daylight. Some one passed the word that the naval authorities had declared that they would have to pull out at a certain hour, whether we were