

(Nearly) The Day They ^e Evacuated Dover

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A long column of civilians, all Dover people, snaked along the Alkham Valley. Hundreds more were in another slow moving column in the Elms Vale and yet another in the Coombe Valley, all moving westward. They made a sorry sight with the better dressed carrying suit cases while the poorer ones had bundled their belongings up in bed sheets. A few old people had been supplied with confiscated barrows and carts. The very old were being carried in the push carts, some hauled by donkeys. All had one destination - Acrise. It was spring 1918 and a German invasion was expected any day. The enemy had fought his way forward through France and was threatening Calais and Boulogne.

The evacuation of Dover, although it never actually took place, was meticulously planned by an emergency committee chaired by brewer A.C. Leney who had been appointed Evacuation Officer-in-charge with headquarters at the Town Hall. As the guns could be heard across the Channel, the committee prepared notices that, if necessary, would enforce the evacuation of the town immediately.

The war was going so badly in France that the military authorities decided to distribute the warning notices to every household on the 10th July 1918 to prepare people to get their valuables together ready for likely evacuation. All civilians living in the town and at River were to meet at prescribed places of assembly and there await orders to depart together for the country. The aim was to keep evacuees off the main roads and the railways that would be needed by the military for reinforcements to fight off the invaders.

The town was split up into 10 districts: those living in the Pier district were to assemble outside the Packet Yard in Snargate Street. Those in Snargate Street were to gather in the Market Square. Castle Place was to be the assembly point for those living at the East Cliff, Townwall

Street and Woolcomber Street areas. Even River residents would have to move out after gathering outside the Railway Bell at Kearsney. Other assembly points were Pencester Road, Saxon Street, Elms Vale Road, Charlton Green, East Street for Tower Hamlets folk, and outside the Athletic ground.

Assembled, the population was to move up the country valleys on the first day to Acrise. Arrangements were made to supply water and tinned meat to the evacuees as they trudged on their way. Special constables were warned they would have to accompany each contingent to keep order. On reaching Acrise the next march would be to Brabourne and the third to Ham Street where it was hoped there would be trains waiting to carry the Dovorians to the West of England by the south coast railway.

All was ready for the great evacuation. Then, suddenly and unexpectedly, there was a change in the fortunes of war. It was the German army that began retreating....and by November Dover was joining with everyone else in Great Britain celebrating victory. The townsfolk could sleep peacefully again, at least until 1940 when the enemy was again threatening the town with bombs, shells and possible invasion.