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THE BATTLE OF CRETE

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on 4th August, 1941, by Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham, G.C.B., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean.

Mediterranean.

4th August, 1941.

Be pleased to lay before Their Lordships, the attached reports of naval operations in defence of Crete between 15th May and 27th May, 1941. Reports on the evacuation of troops from Crete will be forwarded later.

2. The object of the operations was the prevention of enemy seaborne landings on the coast of Crete. It was known that airborne invasion of the island was impending; but it appeared almost inconceivable that airborne invasion alone could succeed against forewarned troops, that seaborne support was inevitable and that the destruction of troop convoys would win the day.

3. The Navy succeeded in its object but paid a heavy price for this achievement. The fleet was operating within easy range of enemy air bases and beyond the reach of any protection from our own air force. The fleet fighters of H.M.S. FORMIDABLE were reduced to only four as a result of casualties and unserviceability arising from the recent operation "Tiger."* It was, therefore, useless to send H.M.S. FORMIDABLE to assist.

* Footnote: Operation "Tiger" was the passage of naval reinforcements and a convoy containing urgent military stores through the Mediterranean, covered by Force H as far as the Sicilian Narrows and thence by the Mediterranean Fleet to Alexandria. It took place between the 4th and 9th May, 1941.

So, without air support of any sort, the fleet had to be exposed to a scale of air attack which is believed to have exceeded anything of the kind yet experienced afloat.*

4. The air attack on Crete started on the 20th May, 1941. The sweeps of the Light Forces on the night 20th/21st and during daylight 21st were uneventful except for heavy air attacks and the unlucky loss of H.M.S. JUNO (see paragraphs 14 to 20).† As far as the Navy was concerned, the real Battle of Crete began on the night of 21st/22nd May, with the successful encounter of Force D with an enemy convoy (see paragraph 23). This encounter was skilfully and thoroughly exploited, was a heavy blow to the Germans and an encouragement for our hard pressed troops in Crete.

* Footnote: Air Ministry comment: The R.A.F. in the Middle East had suffered severe losses during the Greek campaign and in Cyrenaica, and fighter strength was so reduced as to be barely sufficient for the defence of the Middle East base itself. The strength of the bomber force was scarcely better. In the face of pressing commitments it had only been possible to spare resources for the construction of two airfields in Crete and these were but moderately equipped. From these airfields, before the loss of Greece, it had been possible to operate a handful of R.A.F. and F.A.A. fighters for the occasional protection of shipping, but now confronted with the German Air Force operating in overwhelming numbers from ample bases in Greece and the adjoining islands, and in view of the dangerous depletion of Middle East air forces as a whole, decision reluctantly had to be taken that the maintenance of fighter forces in Crete merely invited destruction and could not be justified. With this view, the Commanders-in-Chief in the Middle East were in agreement.

Though every possible effort was made by aircraft based in Africa and in Malta to attack enemy airfields they could make little impression on the overwhelming strength of the G.A.F. Shore based fighter cover to our ships operating to the north of Crete was clearly out of the question.

† Footnote: References are to paragraphs in the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's narrative.

5. It was on the morning of the 22nd May, that things commenced to go awry. The enemy convoy sighted by Force C was almost certainly a large one (see paragraph 27). The Rear Admiral Commanding, Fifteenth Cruiser Squadron was presented with a unique opportunity of effecting its destruction but unfortunately, in the face of heavy air attacks, and with H.A. ammunition stocks beginning to run low, he decided that he would not have been justified in pressing on to the northward and gave the order to withdraw. The situation was undoubtedly a difficult one for him, as this attack was certainly on a majestic scale but it appears that no diminution of risk could have been achieved by retirement and that, in fact, the safest place for the squadron would have been among the enemy ships. The brief action did, however, have the effect of turning back the convoy, and the troops, if they ever did reach Crete, were not in time to influence the battle.

6. In the meantime, a further unlucky decision had been taken (see paragraphs 25 and 26). DIDO, wearing the flag of the Rear Admiral (D), Mediterranean, had expended 70 per cent. of her A.A. ammunition. The destroyers were also running low; but AJAX and ORION had 42 and 38 per cent. respectively remaining. The Rear Admiral (D), Mediterranean, correctly decided that DIDO must withdraw from the Aegean; but, from very natural reluctance to leave other ships of his squadron to face the music after he himself had retired, he took AJAX and ORION with him. This decision, although such results could hardly have been foreseen, deprived the hard pressed Force C of their assistance at a time when the weight of their A.A. fire would have been an invaluable support.

7. The junction of Forces A and C on the afternoon of the 22nd May, left the Rear Admiral Commanding, Fifteenth Cruiser Squadron, after a gruelling two days, in command of the combined force. Before he had really time to grasp the situation of his force, a series of disasters occurred, the loss of GREYHOUND, GLOUCESTER and finally FIJI.

8. Past experience had gone to show that when under heavy scale of air attack it is essential to keep ships together for mutual support. The decision to send KANDAHAR and KINGSTON to the rescue of GREYHOUND's people cannot be cavilled at but in the light of subsequent events it would probably have been better had the whole force closed to their support. The Rear Admiral Commanding, 15th Cruiser Squadron was however not aware of the shortage of A.A. ammunition in GLOUCESTER and FIJI. As a final misfortune, when rejoining after the loss of GLOUCESTER, FIJI steered a course diverging from that of the fleet, which she could no longer see.

9. Late on the 22nd May, a "Most Immediate" message was received by the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, from the Rear Admiral Commanding, Seventh Cruiser Squadron, from which it appeared, owing to calligraphic error, that the battleships of Force A had no pom-pom ammunition left. In fact they had plenty. It was on this account that orders were given at 0408/23rd

May for all forces to withdraw to the eastward. Had this error not occurred the battleships would not have been ordered back to Alexandria and would have been available as a support and rallying point for the 5th Destroyer Flotilla on the morning of the 23rd May, so that the loss of KELLY and KASHMIR might well have been avoided (see paragraph 46).

10. That the fleet suffered disastrously in this encounter with the unhampered German Air Force is evident but it has to be remembered on the credit side that the Navy's duty was achieved and no enemy ship whether warship or transport succeeded in reaching Crete or intervening in the battle during these critical days. Nor should the losses sustained blind one to the magnificent courage and endurance that was displayed throughout. I have never felt prouder of the Mediterranean Fleet than at the close of these particular operations, except perhaps, at the fashion in which it faced up to the even greater strain which was so soon to be imposed upon it.

11. Where so much that was meritorious was performed it is almost invidious to particularise, but I feel that I must draw the attention of Their Lordships to two outstanding examples. These are the conduct of KANDAHAR (Commander W. G. A. Robson, Royal Navy) and KINGSTON (Lieutenant Commander P. Somerville, D.S.O., Royal Navy) during the whole period of the operation and, in particular, the rescue of the crews of GREYHOUND and FIJI (see paragraphs 34 to 39). KANDAHAR has recorded that between 1445 and 1930 she was subjected to 22 separate air attacks and all the rescue work during daylight was carried out in face of heavy bombing and machine gunning. The other story is that of the gallantry and devotion of Commander W. R. Marshall A'Deane, Royal Navy, of GREYHOUND, whose self sacrifice stands out even amongst this record of fine deeds.

After the loss of his own ship he was picked up by KANDAHAR. Whilst KANDAHAR was engaged in rescuing the crew of the FIJI, Commander Marshall A'Deane dived overboard, in the darkness, to the assistance of a man some way from the ship. He was not seen again.

12. Rear Admiral H. B. Rawlings, O.B.E., in the WARSPITE, had a particularly anxious time. He handled a series of difficult situations in a determined and skilful manner and by his timely support undoubtedly did all possible to extricate Forces C and D from their awkward situation on the evening of the 22nd May.

13. The skilful operation of the forces under the Rear Admiral (D), Mediterranean, which led to the destruction of the first enemy convoy has already been mentioned.

14. The Naval Officer-in-Charge, Suda, Captain J. A. V. Morse, D.S.O., Royal Navy, followed up his excellent work in organising the port at Suda by consistently presenting a clear and concise picture of the situation by his signals during the battle. His presence at Suda was invaluable.

(Signed) A. B. CUNNINGHAM.
Admiral.

Commander-in-Chief,
Mediterranean.

THE BATTLE OF CRETE

NARRATIVE BY THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF,
MEDITERRANEAN

The narrative of the Battle of Crete is divided into four phases:—

Phase I—Building up Suda into a port capable of supplying the needs of the Army.

Phase II—Naval dispositions to meet the expected attack.

Phase III—The attack on Crete.

Phase IV—The evacuation of the British and Imperial forces from the island.

Phase I

BUILDING UP SUDA INTO A PORT CAPABLE OF
SUPPLYING THE NEEDS OF THE ARMY.

Operation "Demon," during which over 50,000 troops had been evacuated from Greece, was completed on 29th April, 1941. Some 25,000 of these troops, the majority of whom had no equipment other than rifles, were being re-organised in Crete. A large number was useless for defence purposes and were awaiting removal.

2. The facilities for unloading supply ships in Suda Bay were poor. The harbour was being subjected to frequent air attack which caused heavy casualties among the ships unloading. The problem of keeping up supplies was causing anxiety, but strenuous efforts on the part of the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Suda, were going some way towards solving the various local difficulties.

3. During the period from 29th April to 20th May, some 15,000 tons of Army stores were off-loaded from 15 ships, whilst eight ships were sunk or damaged in the harbour by air attack. The scale of enemy air attack was so heavy, and our fighter protection so thin, that the running of convoys in and out of Crete was being carried out at considerable risk.

4. It had been intended to set up the complete M.N.B.D.O.* in Crete. The M.N.B.D.O. A.A. guns had been installed at Suda but the danger of losing ships through enemy air action was considered too great to allow any further M.N.B.D.O. storeships to be sent to Crete.

5. On the night 15th/16th May, GLOUCESTER and FIJI embarked the 2nd Battalion of the Leicester Regiment, with their full equipment, at Alexandria, and landed them at Heraklion. During the night 18th/19th May, GLENGYLE, escorted by COVENTRY, WATERHEN, VOYAGER and AUCKLAND took 700 men of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders from Alexandria to Tymbaki.

Phase II.

NAVAL DISPOSITIONS TO MEET THE
EXPECTED ATTACK.

6. Although intelligence suggested that an attack on Crete was very likely, the exact date of the attack could not be forecast. It was thought that the most probable date for the attack to begin was about the 17th May. The use of Suda Bay as an anchorage by day was limited, on account of heavy air raids. It was, therefore, necessary to operate forces from

Alexandria, which is 420 miles from Suda. A force was to be held in reserve at Alexandria as an attack might start at a time when our forces at sea were getting short of fuel. Although the first airborne attack on Crete did not take place until the 20th May, naval forces had to be kept ready at sea from the 14th May onwards.

7. The object of the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, was to prevent the enemy landing in Crete from the sea. The most likely places for an enemy seaborne landing were thought to be Canea, Retimo and Heraklion whilst Kissamo Bay and Sitia were possibilities. On the 15th May forces were at sea, to the south of Crete, ready to move to any threatened point. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean signalled his intentions as follows:—

(a) Force C (R.A.D. in DIDO with KANDAHAR, NUBIAN, KINGSTON, JUNO and COVENTRY) was to be available to deal with Heraklion and Sitia.

(b) Force D (NAIAD, PHOEBE and two destroyers) would deal with any landing west of Retimo.

(c) Force B (GLOUCESTER and FIJI) would deal with enemy forces north west of Crete, or support Force D.

(d) Force A (Vice Admiral 1st Battle Squadron, in QUEEN ELIZABETH with BARHAM and five destroyers) was to take up a position to the westward of Crete so as to act as cover to the other forces.

(e) *In reserve at Alexandria.* WARSPITE, VALIANT, FORMIDABLE, ORION and AJAX and remaining available destroyers.

(f) The general idea was for night sweeps to be carried out as follows:—

(i) Force B to sweep the west coast of Greece from Matapan;

(ii) Force D to sweep from Anti Kithera to Piraeus;

(iii) Force C to sweep from Kaso towards Leros.

(g) All forces were to retire from their sweeps so as to be close north of Crete by dawn. Subsequently they were to retire to the south of Crete.

(h) The submarine RORQUAL was to operate in the vicinity of Lemnos.

(i) A flotilla of M.T.B.s was based at Suda Bay.

(j) ABDIEL was to lay a minefield between Cephalonia and Levkas, to interrupt enemy communications through the Corinth Canal.

(k) Appropriate air reconnaissance was arranged, but it was very thin.

(l) The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, would control the operation from Alexandria but the Senior Officers of the various forces were informed that they were expected to take independent action to intercept any enemy forces reported.

8. FORMIDABLE was reduced to only four aircraft serviceable and was unable to provide fighter protection to our forces until the 25th May. This shortage of aircraft in FORMIDABLE was due to losses and wear and tear during the recent operations "Tiger" and the Tripoli bombardment. There were still a few shore-based fighters in Crete but they were being rapidly reduced by enemy air action and could not be of any assistance to the fleet. The

* Footnote: M.N.B.D.O.—Mobile Naval Base Defence Organisation, the personnel of which were Royal Marines.

fleet was thus compelled to operate close to enemy air bases without any fighter protection whatsoever.

9. The sweeps referred to in paragraph 7 above were carried out on the night 16th/17th May, without result and the forces taking part withdrew to the south of Crete. On the 18th May, arrangements were made to relieve forces at sea. The re-distribution of forces was effected as follows:—

(a) C.S.7 shifted his flag to WARSPITE and left Alexandria at 2000/18th May with Force A1 (WARSPITE, VALIANT, AJAX, NAPIER, KIMBERLEY, JANUS, ISIS, HERWARD, DECOY, HERO and GRIFFIN).

(b) Force A was to return to Alexandria on relief by Force A1. When these two forces met, HOTSPUR and IMPERIAL were to be transferred from Force A to Force A1.

(c) C.S.15 in NAIAD, with PERTH, KANDAHAR, NUBIAN, KINGSTON and JUNO was to return to Alexandria, fuel his ships and leave again early on the 19th May.

(d) R.A.D. in DIDO was to return to Alexandria and then leave early on the 19th May with ORION, GREYHOUND and HASTY. He was to be joined by AJAX, HERO and HERWARD from Force A1.

(e) GLOUCESTER and FIJI, who were getting short of fuel, were to return to Alexandria, fuel and sail again to join Force A1.

10. During the night 19th/20th May, Tank Landing Craft number A.2 escorted by KOS19* landed three "I" tanks at Tymbaki. These tanks were to make their way to Heraklion for the defence of the aerodrome.

Phase III.

THE ATTACK ON CRETE.

20th May, 1941.

11. The position of our naval forces at sea at daylight on the 20th May, was:—

(a) Force A1 about 100 miles to the west of Crete and shortly to be joined by the force with R.A.D.

(b) The force with C.S.15 had reached the Kaso Strait during the previous night and was now withdrawing to the southward.

(c) The force with R.A.D. had reached the Anti Kithera Strait during the night and was now proceeding to join Force A1.

(d) Force B (GLOUCESTER and FIJI) having fuelled at Alexandria, were on their way to join Force A1.

12. At 0800 on 20th May, 1941, only three weeks after the British withdrawal from Greece, the Germans began their attack on Crete. This took the form of intense bombing of the vicinity of Maleme aerodrome closely followed by the landing of troops by parachute, glider and troop-carrying aircraft. The enemy's main objective appeared to be Maleme but later in the day similar attacks developed at Heraklion and Retimo.

13. As regards our Air Force, the increased scale of enemy air attacks on aerodromes since the 13th May had imposed a very heavy strain on the fighter force in Crete. This force by the 19th May had been reduced to only seven

fighter aircraft fit for operations. No reinforcements were available in Egypt. It had, therefore, been decided to fly all serviceable aircraft back to Egypt on the 19th May, until the scale of enemy attack lessened or reinforcements became available. From the 19th May to the 26th May naval forces operating in the vicinity of Crete were without fighter protection.

14. On learning that the attack on Crete had started, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, at once ordered forces at sea to move up towards Crete, but failing further developments they were to keep out of sight of land. During the forenoon of the 20th May, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean signalled his intentions as follows:—

(a) Force D consisting of R.A.D. in DIDO with ORION, AJAX, ISIS, KIMBERLEY, IMPERIAL and JANUS, was to pass the Anti Kithera Channel by 2200/20th May, sweep Capes Malea—Hydra—Phalconera and be off Canea at 0700/21st.

(b) Force C consisting of C.S.15 in NAIAD with PERTH, KANDAHAR, NUBIAN, KINGSTON and JUNO, was to pass Kaso Strait at 2200/20th, sweep round Stampalia and be off Heraklion at 0700/21st.

(c) Force B consisting of GLOUCESTER and FIJI was to pass close off Cape Matapan at 0400/21st and then join Force A1 about 50 miles west of Crete (position 35° 20' N., 22° 25' E.) at 0700/21st.

(d) CALCUTTA was to pass through the Kaso Strait after Force C which she was to join off Heraklion at 0700/21st.

(e) A new Force E (D.14 in JERVIS with NIZAM and ILEX) was to bombard Scarpanto aerodrome during the night 20th/21st May, withdrawing to the southward before daylight.

(f) CARLISLE who was at Alexandria would sail as soon as ready so as to join Force E 50 miles south east of Crete (position 34° 30' N., 27° 00' E.) at 0700/21st May.

15. As a result of air reconnaissance reports of caiques sighted in the Aegean, Forces C and D were ordered at 1800 to move to the north of Crete, at once. It was then thought that if our forces carried out the sweeps that had already been arranged there was a danger of their missing southbound enemy convoys in the darkness. The night sweeps for Forces C and D were accordingly cancelled. Instead Forces C and D were ordered to establish patrols north of Crete to the west and east of longitude 25° E. respectively. Force C was to cover the vicinity of Heraklion, whilst Force D was to guard the Maleme—Canea—Kissamo Bay area. The Retimo area was to be looked after by local craft from Suda Bay.

16. At nightfall on the 20th May, the situation at Maleme and Canea was reported to be in hand, though about 1,200 of the 3,000 enemy who had landed by air were unaccounted for. In the Heraklion and Retimo area it was known that parachutists had landed, but details were lacking. Boats carrying troops had been reported off Heraklion.

17. During the night 20th/21st, Force C encountered about six M.A.S.* boats in the Kaso

* *Footnote:* KOS—an armed Norwegian trawler.

* *Footnote:* Italian motor boats, operating as M.T.B.s.

Strait. After being engaged by JUNO, KAN-DAHAR and NAIAD, the M.A.S. boats retired, four of them having been damaged. Force E bombarded Scarpanto aerodrome. Results could not be observed but intelligence reports later indicated that two D.O.17 aircraft had been damaged.

21st May, 1941.

18. At daylight on the 21st May the position of our forces was:—

(a) C.S.7 with Force A1 was 60 miles west of the Anti Kithera Strait steering to the south east to meet Force D which was returning from the Aegean patrol.

(b) R.A.D. with Force D had sighted nothing during his patrol in the Maleme-Canea-Kissamo Bay areas and was now on his way to join Force A1.

(c) C.S.15 with Force C had encountered M.A.S. boats during the night, but apart from that had nothing to report. He was now withdrawing through the Kaso Strait to the southward, having been joined by CAL-CUTTA at 0600.

(d) D.14 with Force E, after bombarding Scarpanto, was on his way to join Force C.

(e) Force B had sighted nothing during their patrol up to Cape Matapan and were now joining Force A1.

(f) CARLISLE was on her way from Alexandria with orders to join Force C.

(g) ABDIEL was returning to Alexandria from her minelaying operation.

It was intended that forces should remain to the south of Crete by day. After dark the night sweeps were to be repeated.

19. During daylight on the 21st May our naval forces were subjected to heavy air attacks. Force A1 was attacked once during the forenoon and for two and a half hours during the afternoon. Force C was bombed continuously from 0950 to 1350. At 1249 JUNO was hit by bombs and sank in two minutes. CARLISLE joined Force C at 1400. Force D was heavily attacked during the forenoon, AJAX being damaged by near misses. After two and a half hours of bombing during the afternoon, when in company with Force A1, they were again attacked in the evening. During these attacks on Forces A and D at least three aircraft were certainly, and two more probably, shot down. The attacks on Force C were so incessant that no reliable estimate can be made of the casualties inflicted on aircraft; at least two were seen to be damaged and in difficulties, and one shot down.

20. During the day Force A1 remained to the south west of Kithera where it was joined by Forces B and D.

21. The airborne attacks on Crete on 21st May continued with great intensity and Maleme was captured by the enemy.

22. No seaborne landing had yet taken place but air reconnaissance reported groups of small craft, escorted by destroyers, steering towards Crete from Milo. Forces B, C and D accordingly closed in through Kithera and Kaso Straits in order to prevent a seaborne landing during the night 21st/22nd May. If there were no developments during the night Forces C and D were to commence working northwards at 0530/22nd on a wide zigzag to locate convoys.

23. At 2330/21st, Force D (now consisting of R.A.D. in DIDO, with ORION, AJAX, JANUS, KIMBERLEY, HASTY and HERWARD) encountered an enemy troop convoy of caiques escorted by one or two torpedo boats 18 miles north of Canea. The caiques, which were crowded with German soldiers, were engaged for two and a half hours. R.D.F. and A.S.V.* proved invaluable in leading our forces on to fresh targets. In all, one or two steamers, at least a dozen caiques, a small pleasure steamer and a steam yacht were either sunk or left burning. One of the escorting torpedo boats, after firing torpedoes at our cruisers, was damaged by gunfire from DIDO and finally blown up by a broadside from AJAX. It is estimated that the vessels sunk carried about 4,000 German troops.

24. After taking a further sweep to the east and north, R.A.D. turned west at 0330/22nd giving his force a rendezvous for 0600/22nd about 30 miles west of Crete. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's intentions had been for Forces C and D to work to the northward, commencing 0530/22nd, if there were no developments during the night (the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's signal timed 1843 of 21st May). The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean later amplified this by ordering Forces C and D to join company and sweep to within 25 miles of Milo to locate convoys (the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's signal timed 0402/22nd May). The latter message did not reach R.A.D. until after he had withdrawn outside the Aegean. R.A.D. only took the decision to withdraw after careful consideration. DIDO had expended 70 per cent. of her A.A. ammunition (22 per cent. having been used up between 0600 and 0930 on the 21st May). ORION had expended 62 per cent. and AJAX 58 per cent. R.A.D. felt that his force might well find itself unable to deal with the further expected scale of air attack. He reported the result of his attack on the convoy to the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, adding that in view of the serious shortage of A.A. ammunition he was joining Force A1 (the Rear Admiral (D), Mediterranean's signal timed 0405 of 22nd May).

25. On receipt of R.A.D.'s 0405 of 22nd May, reporting the A.A. ammunition shortage, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, ordered Force D to return to Alexandria with all despatch (the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's signal timed 0716/22nd May).

22nd May, 1941.

26. At daylight on the 22nd May the position was as follows:—

(a) Force A1 was about 45 miles south west of the Kithera Channel steering towards the north west.

(b) Force B was joining Force A1.

(c) Force C, having reached a position off Heraklion at 0400 was now sweeping to the north westward in search of convoys of caiques.

(d) Force D was about 30 miles west of the Kithera Channel steering to join Force A1, but were shortly to receive orders from the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, to return to Alexandria with all despatch.

* Footnote: R.D.F.—Radio Direction Finding.
A.S.V.—Radar equipment in aircraft.

(e) D.5 in KELLY with KASHMIR, KIPLING, KELVIN and JACKAL had left Malta at 2130/21st May and had orders to join Force A1 to the west of Crete at 1000/22nd May.

(f) D.14 in JERVIS with NIZAM and ILEX had returned to Alexandria to refuel and were now steering for the Kaso Strait.

(g) D.10 in STUART with VOYAGER and VENDETTA had left Alexandria on the 21st May with orders to join Force A1.

27. At 0830 Force C was steering towards Milo when a single caique was sighted. This caique, which was carrying German troops, was sunk by PERTH whilst NAIAD engaged large numbers of aircraft who were bombing. At 0909 CALCUTTA reported a small merchant vessel ahead and destroyers were ordered to sink her. At 1000 Force C was 25 miles south of the eastern corner of Milo. PERTH had rejoined after sinking the caique but NAIAD was still some way astern. Ten minutes later an enemy destroyer with four or five small sailing vessels was sighted to the northward. Our destroyers immediately gave chase, whilst PERTH and NAIAD engaged the enemy destroyer, causing her to retire under smoke. KINGSTON engaged an enemy destroyer at 7,000 yards, claiming two hits. She also reported sighting a large number of caiques behind the smoke screen, which the enemy destroyer was now making. Although in contact with the enemy convoy, C.S.15 considered that he would jeopardise his whole force if he proceeded any further to the northward. H.A. ammunition was beginning to run low. The speed of his force, which he considered must be kept together in face of the continuous air attacks, was limited to 20 knots, on account of CARLISLE's maximum speed being 21 knots. C.S.15, therefore, decided to withdraw and ordered the destroyers to abandon the chase. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's message timed 0941 of 22nd May, which showed that this convoy was of considerable size, was not seen by C.S.15 until after 1100.

28. Force C was bombed practically continuously from 0945 for three and a half hours. NAIAD was damaged by near misses which put two turrets out of action, flooded several compartments and reduced her speed to 16 knots. CARLISLE was hit but not seriously damaged. At 1321 Force A1 was sighted coming up to the Kithera Channel from the westward, in response to an appeal for support from C.S.15.

29. During the night 21st/22nd May, Force B (GLOUCESTER and FIJI with GREYHOUND and GRIFFIN) had been patrolling off Cape Matapan. Instructions from the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean to proceed to Heraklion with all despatch reached them too late to be carried out, but they entered the Aegean, and, at daylight, were about 25 miles north of Canea. Whilst withdrawing towards Force A1, Force B was attacked by dive bombers almost continuously from 0630 for one and a half hours. FIJI received slight damage and GLOUCESTER superficial damage during these attacks. Force B joined Force A1 at 0830/22nd May.

30. Force A1 had been 45 miles south west of the Anti Kithera Channel at daylight on 22nd May and was joined by Forces D and B at 0700 and 0830 respectively. The H.A. ammunition situation was giving cause for anxiety, the amount remaining at 0930 being:—

GLOUCESTER 18%	FIJI 30%
DIDO 25%	ORION 38%
AJAX 40%	WARSPITE 66%
VALIANT 80%	

31. C.S.7 had decided that he would meet Force C in the Kithera Channel about 1530. Meanwhile he continued to patrol with Forces A, B and D between 20 and 30 miles to the west of the channel, apparently, to use his own words, "serving a useful purpose by attracting enemy aircraft."

32. At 1225, C.S.7 heard from C.S.15 that NAIAD was badly damaged and in need of support. C.S.7 immediately decided to enter the Aegean and increased to 23 knots.

33. C.S.7 sighted A.A. shell bursts from Force B at 1312. Twenty minutes later WARSPITE, in which C.S.7 was wearing his flag, was hit by a bomb which wrecked the starboard 4" and 6" batteries.

34. At 1320 GREYHOUND was detached from Force A1 to sink a large caique between Pori and Anti Kithera Islands. She successfully accomplished this and was returning to her position on the screen when at 1351 she was hit by two bombs and 15 minutes later sank stern first in approximate position 270° Pori Island 5 miles. C.S.15 (who was the senior officer of forces present) ordered KANDAHAR and KINGSTON to pick up survivors from GREYHOUND. At 1402 C.S.15 ordered FIJI, and, five minutes later, GLOUCESTER, to give KANDAHAR and KINGSTON A.A. support and to stand by GREYHOUND until dark. These rescuing ships and the men swimming in the water were subjected to almost continuous bombing and machine gun attacks. C.S.15 did not realise at first how little A.A. ammunition was left in GLOUCESTER and FIJI. At 1413 C.S.15 asked C.S.7 for close support as his force had practically no ammunition left. Force A1 closed Force C at WARSPITE's best speed (18 knots) and C.S.7 who was feeling uneasy about the orders given to GLOUCESTER and FIJI, informed C.S.15 about the state of their H.A. ammunition. At 1457 C.S.15 ordered GLOUCESTER and FIJI to withdraw, with ships in company, at their discretion.

35. At 1530 GLOUCESTER and FIJI were sighted coming up astern of Force A1 at high speed, engaging enemy aircraft. At about 1550 GLOUCESTER was hit by several bombs and immobilised in approximate position 294° Pori 9 miles. She was badly on fire and her upper deck was a shambles. In view of the continuous air attacks, FIJI reluctantly decided that she must leave GLOUCESTER. FIJI reported the situation to C.S.15. After consulting C.S.7, C.S.15 decided that to take the battlefleet back in support of GLOUCESTER would only be risking more ships.

36. Air attacks on Force A1 had continued intermittently from 1320 until 1510. At 1645 further high level attacks were made and VALIANT was hit aft by two medium bombs but no serious damage was done.

37. By this time Force C was nearly out of H.A. ammunition and both forces were withdrawing to the south westward. Course was altered to the southward at 1830 and to the eastward at 2100. At 1700 FIJI, who had KANDAHAR and KINGSTON in company, reported her position as 305° Cape Elaphonisi 24 miles, steering 175° at 27 knots. This position was 30 miles due east from Forces A1 and C, who were then steering 215°.

38. At 1845 FIJI, who had survived some 20 bombing attacks by aircraft formations during the past four hours, fell a victim to a single M.E.109. This machine flew out of the clouds in a shallow dive and dropped its bomb very close to the port side, amidships. The ship took up a 25° list and soon came to a stop with her engines crippled. Half an hour later another single machine dropped three bombs which landed over "A" boiler room. The list soon increased to 30° and at 2015 the ship rolled right over. KANDAHAR and KINGSTON lowered boats and rafts and withdrew to avoid almost certain damage from air attack. They returned after dark to pick up more men and finally succeeded in rescuing a total of 523. They had been subjected to no less than 22 air attacks between 1445 and 1920 and were now getting short of fuel. At 2245 they proceeded at 15 knots to join C.S.15.

39. At 1928 C.S.7 learned from KANDAHAR that FIJI was sinking. C.S.7 immediately ordered D.10, who was to join him on the following day, to proceed with VOYAGER and VENDETTA to FIJI's position. At 2030, in accordance with instructions received from the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, C.S.7 detached DECOY and HERO to the south coast of Crete to embark the King of Greece.

40. During the day the casualties to ships had been, two cruisers and one destroyer sunk, with two battleships and two cruisers damaged. The only casualties to enemy aircraft which could be claimed with certainty amounted to two shot down, six probably shot down and five damaged. It is probable that enemy losses in aircraft were greater than this.

41. Captain (D), Fifth Destroyer Flotilla, in KELLY, with KASHMIR, KIPLING, KELVIN and JACKAL had left Malta at 2130/21st May and joined C.S.7 at 1600/22nd. At 2030/22nd KELLY, KASHMIR and KIPLING were detached to look for survivors from FIJI and half an hour later, KELVIN and JACKAL were sent to try and pick up any of GLOUCESTER's crew who could be found. C.S.7 however, subsequently ordered the search to be abandoned and sent the 5th D.F. to patrol inside Kissamo and Canea Bays. On arrival at the Anti Kithera Channel, KIPLING developed a steering defect and D.5 ordered her to join C.S.7. Continuing into Canea Bay, KELLY and KASHMIR encountered a troop-carrying caique, which they damaged badly by gunfire. These two ships then carried out a short bombardment of Maleme. Whilst withdrawing they encountered another caique which they engaged and set on fire. KELVIN and JACKAL were detached to investigate some lights which the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Suda, had reported being seen in Canea Bay. These proved to be shore lights so KELVIN and

JACKAL withdrew independently and informed the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean by signal (KELVIN's signal timed 0300C of 23rd May).

42. Force E (D.14 in JERVIS with ILEX, NIZAM and HAVOCK) patrolled off Heraklion during the night 22nd/23rd May without incident and then withdrew to Alexandria. During the afternoon the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, gave orders for AJAX and ORION, who were returning with R.A.D. to Alexandria, to join D.14 about 80 miles south west of Kaso. The intention was for this force to cover Heraklion during the night 22nd/23rd May. R.A.D. detached these two ships at 1730/22nd when about 150 miles from the Kaso Strait. In the meantime, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean had ordered D.14 to pass the Kaso Strait at 2100/22nd (the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's signal timed 1312 of 22nd May). AJAX, realising that she could not possibly join D.14 in time, decided to rejoin R.A.D. and informed the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean accordingly (AJAX's signal timed 1843 of 22nd May).

43. At Alexandria, GLENROY embarked 900 men of the Queens Royal Regiment, the Headquarters of the 16th Infantry Brigade and 18 vehicles. She sailed for Tymbaki p.m. 22nd May escorted by COVENTRY, AUCKLAND and FLAMINGO. JAGUAR and DEFENDER, after embarking ammunition urgently required by the Army, left Alexandria to join Force A1 and then proceed so as to arrive Suda during the night 23rd/24th May.

44. Minefields were successfully laid by ABDIEL between Cephalonia and Levkas and by RORQUAL in the Gulf of Salonika.

45. Meanwhile, in Crete, the enemy was concentrating on the Maleme area, where his troop carriers continued to arrive and depart on 22nd May at the rate of more than 20 per hour. A plan to counter attack Maleme had to be abandoned and our troops commenced to withdraw to a new line.

46. At 2230/22nd May a "Most Immediate" message was received from C.S.7 reporting the loss of GLOUCESTER and FIJI and giving the ammunition situation in the battleships and destroyers. It appeared from this signal that the battleships had run right out of pom pom ammunition. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, accordingly decided to withdraw all forces to Alexandria (the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's signal timed 0408 of 23rd May).

23rd May, 1941.

47. The naval position at daylight on 23rd May was as follows:—

(a) At 0408 the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, had ordered all forces to withdraw to Alexandria, with the exception of GLENROY and escort.

(b) Forces A1 and C, about 25 miles apart, were joining each other and returning to Alexandria. KANDAHAR and KINGSTON were joining Force C.

(c) D.5 in KELLY, with KASHMIR and KIPLING had just cleared Canea Bay and was returning to Alexandria. KELVIN and

JACKAL were returning independently and were south west of Crete.

(d) Force E was returning to Alexandria.

(e) DECOY and HERO were joining Force A1, having embarked the King of Greece, H.B.M. Minister and other important personages from Agriarumeli (south coast of Crete) during the previous night.

(f) Force D were on their way to Alexandria, DIDO was just outside the harbour, AJAX and ORION were some way astern of DIDO as they had not had time to rejoin.

(g) Captain (D) 10th Destroyer Flotilla; in STUART, with VOYAGER and VENDETTA, was off Gavdo Island, having received orders from C.S.7 to search for FIJI survivors.

(h) JAGUAR and DEFENDER had been detached from Force A1 and were south west of Gavdo, making for Suda Bay, with ammunition urgently required by the Army.

48. Captain D.5 with his flotilla had been retiring at full speed from Canea since dawn. After surviving two air attacks without being damaged they were attacked at 0755 by 24 JU.87 divebombers. KASHMIR was hit and sank in two minutes. KELLY was doing 30 knots, under full starboard rudder, when she was hit by a large bomb. The ship took up an ever-increasing list to port, finally turning turtle with considerable way on. After floating upside down for half an hour she finally sank. The dive bombers, before leaving, machine gunned the men in the water, killing and wounding several.

49. KIPLING immediately closed to pick up survivors from KELLY and KASHMIR. For three hours KIPLING continued with her rescue work, in which she was considerably hampered by six high level bombing attacks. After picking up 279 officers and men from the water KIPLING left the scene, at 1100, for Alexandria. She estimated that between 0820 and 1300 no less than 40 aircraft attacked her, dropping 83 bombs, but she emerged from this ordeal unscathed. C.S.15 reluctantly decided that he could send her no help from Force C or Force A1. It was necessary to send PROTECTOR to meet her at 0800 the next day, 50 miles from Alexandria, as she had run right out of fuel. In these engagements the 5th D.F. shot down at least two, and damaged at least four, enemy aircraft.

50. In view of the intense scale of air attack off Crete, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, after consulting the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, ordered GLENROY and escort, at 1127, to return to Alexandria. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, then made a further plan for the reinforcement of Crete, using ABDIEL and/or destroyers. The Admiralty, at 1559, ordered GLENROY to turn northwards, pending instructions. At 1651 the Admiralty urged the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, to land the reinforcements from GLENROY in Crete, if it could be done that night. At 1837 the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, informed the Admiralty that it was much too late for GLENROY to reach Tymbaki that night (23rd/24th May). At 2237 the Admiralty was informed that the GLENROY, had she continued northward, would have been in the worst possible position for enemy air attacks at daylight. Disembarkation of

troops by day was out of the question. She had, therefore, been ordered to Alexandria.

51. In Crete the Army formed a new line in the Maleme-Canea sector. Very heavy air attacks were being made on our troops, who were without fighter cover, and the enemy kept up a steady flow of reinforcements with his troop carriers. The five M.T.B.s of the 10th M.T.B. Flotilla in Suda Bay were singled out for attack by aircraft and all were sunk. During their operations off the Cretan coast and while in harbour, the M.T.B.s accounted for two aircraft for certain and two probably shot down. The Naval Officer-in-Charge, Suda Bay, decided that the time had come to consider plans for evacuation. At Heraklion, an ultimatum was received from the enemy, calling for Heraklion to surrender but this was rejected by the British and Greek Commanders.

52. During the night 23rd/24th May, JAGUAR and DEFENDER disembarked ammunition in Suda Bay and returned to Alexandria via the Kaso Strait.

24th May, 1941.

53. The naval situation at daylight on the 24th May was:—

(a) Forces A1, C and E had arrived Alexandria during the previous night.

(b) PROTECTOR had gone out to meet KIPLING who was about 70 miles from Alexandria.

(c) GLENROY escorted by COVENTRY, AUCKLAND and FLAMINGO had returned to Alexandria during the night 23rd/24th May without landing their troops.

(d) JAGUAR and DEFENDER having disembarked ammunition in Suda Bay were returning to Alexandria via the Kaso Strait. They had on board 250 naval officers and ratings not required in Crete.

(e) ABDIEL had left Alexandria during the night of 23rd/24th and was on her way to Suda, with ammunition and stores for the Army.

54. There had been indications that a landing might take place at Sitia during the night 24th/25th. In order to deal with this landing, a force consisting of AJAX (Senior Officer), DIDO, KIMBERLEY and HOTSPUR left Alexandria at 0800 on the 24th May, with orders to pass through the Kaso Strait and sweep the north coast of Crete during the night 24th/25th May. If nothing was sighted and time allowed, this force was also to bombard Maleme aerodrome.

55. ISIS (Senior Officer), HERO and NIZAM sailed from Alexandria at 0930 with the Headquarters and two battalions of Special Service Troops (Layforce) who were to be landed at Selinos Kastelli on the south coast of Crete.

56. The weather was too bad for ISIS and her force to land their troops and they were recalled to Alexandria. The force with AJAX passed through the Kaso Strait and swept along the north of Crete, but they did not encounter any enemy convoys. As they were unable to reach Maleme for the bombardment in time to be well clear by daylight, they withdrew to the southward via Kaso.

57. In Crete, the enemy changed his tactics in the western sector and made a very heavy bombing attack on Canea. The Army force headquarters had to be withdrawn to the naval headquarters at Suda. In the Heraklion area, our troops were still holding out but the Greeks in this sector were getting short of ammunition. The A.A. defences of Suda were by this time seriously reduced by enemy air attacks and casualties in the port to small craft had been heavy.

58. In reply to a request from the Chiefs of Staff (Number 113) for an appreciation, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, said that the scale of air attack now made it no longer possible for the Navy to operate in the Aegean or vicinity of Crete by day. The Navy could not guarantee to prevent seaborne landings without suffering losses, which, added to those already sustained, would very seriously prejudice our command of the Eastern Mediterranean (MIDEAST to TROOPERS 0/67119, of 24th May—time of origin 1815 of 24th May). The Chiefs of Staff (Number 116) replied that unless more drastic naval action was taken than that suggested in the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's appreciation the enemy would be able to reinforce the island to a considerable extent. The Chiefs of Staff added that it was essential that the Commanders-in-Chief should concert measures for clearing up the situation without delay. In so doing the Fleet and Royal Air Force were to accept whatever risk was entailed in preventing any considerable enemy reinforcement reaching Crete. If enemy convoys were reported north of Crete the fleet would have to operate in that area by day although considerable losses might be expected. Experience would show for how long that situation could be maintained. To this the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, replied (on 26th May) that the determining factor in operating in the Aegean was not the fear of sustaining losses but the need to avoid crippling the fleet without commensurate advantage to ourselves. He pointed out that so far the enemy had apparently not succeeded in landing any considerable reinforcements by sea. With regard to the last part of the Chiefs of Staff message, he pointed out that in three days, two cruisers and four destroyers had been sunk, one battleship had been put out of action for several months, whilst two cruisers and four destroyers had been considerably damaged. Since starting to write this message he had heard that FORMIDABLE and NUBIAN had been damaged. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, also referred to the strain, both to personnel and machinery, in the light craft, who had been operating to the limits of their endurance since the end of February (the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's message to the Admiralty timed 1834C of 26th May, 1941).

25th May, 1941.

59. The naval situation at daylight on the 25th May was:—

(a) ABDIEL had left Suda at 0240 with some 60 walking wounded and was on her way back to Alexandria.

(b) The force with AJAX had sighted nothing to the north of Crete. There was no time to carry out the bombardment of Maleme, so the force was now withdrawing through the Kaso Strait.

(c) The force with ISIS were on their way to Alexandria, having been unable to land troops in Crete owing to bad weather.

60. Our information showed that Scarpanto aerodrome was being extensively used by the enemy in his operations against Crete. It was, therefore, decided to attack the aerodrome with Fleet Air Arm aircraft* from FORMIDABLE who had now built up her fighter strength to 12 Fulmars, though some of them were of doubtful reliability. Vice Admiral 1st Battle Squadron was given charge of the operation which was to be known as M.A.Q.3. At 1200 on 25th May, Vice Admiral 1st Battle Squadron in QUEEN ELIZABETH, with BARHAM, FORMIDABLE, JERVIS, JANUS, KANDAHAR, NUBIAN, HASTY, HEReward, VOYAGER and VENDETTA (Force A) left Alexandria to carry out M.A.Q.3.

61. During the evening GLENROY sailed again for Tymbaki, taking the same troops that she had set out with on 22nd May (see paragraph 43). She was escorted by D.10 in STUART, with COVENTRY and JAGUAR.

62. AJAX, with her force, had retired to the south of Crete and was to carry out a repetition of her sweep, during the night 25th/26th May, and if time allowed, bombard Maleme. NAPIER, KELVIN and JACKAL left Alexandria to relieve the destroyers with AJAX.

63. ISIS, HERO and NIZAM had been unable to land their troops on the south coast of Crete owing to bad weather. On arrival back in Alexandria, the troops in ISIS and HERO were transferred to ABDIEL, who sailed early on 26th May with HERO and NIZAM for Suda Bay. In addition to these troops, ABDIEL took about 150 tons of ammunition and stores for the Army.

64. Late that night (25th May) the new line which had been formed in the Maleme—Canea sector in Crete was broken by the enemy, after several attacks had been repulsed.

26th May, 1941.

65. The position of naval forces at daylight was:—

(a) Force A was about 100 miles south south west of Scarpanto. AJAX's force was about to join.

(b) ABDIEL, HERO and NIZAM had left Alexandria during the night 25th/26th May for Suda with troops and stores.

(c) GLENROY, escorted by STUART, COVENTRY and JAGUAR had left Alexandria at 2000/25th May and was on her way to Tymbaki, with troops.

(d) AJAX and her force had repeated the sweep she had carried out on the previous night and had again sighted nothing. This force now consisted of AJAX, DIDO, NAPIER, KELVIN and JACKAL and was about to join Force A. HOTSPUR, IMPERIAL and KIMBERLEY having been relieved, were now returning to Alexandria.

66. Between 0500 and 0600, when Force A was about 100 miles south south west of Scarpanto, four Albacores and four Fulmars from FORMIDABLE attacked Scarpanto aerodrome.

* Footnote: A few R.A.F. Wellingtons also attacked this target.

Of four other aircraft intended to take part in the attack, two could not be flown off and two returned to the carrier owing to unserviceability. The Albacores achieved complete surprise, destroying two aircraft and damaged others while the Fulmars attacked a number of C.R.42s and JU.87s and damaged a number of them. During the forenoon enemy aircraft were continually being detected. The eight remaining serviceable aircraft in FORMIDABLE made 24 flights in the course of the forenoon during which there were 20 combats. Two enemy aircraft were shot down for certain and two were probably destroyed. One Fulmar was lost. At 1320 Force A was attacked by 20 aircraft which approached from the African coast. In dive bombing attacks FORMIDABLE was hit twice. Her starboard side was blown out between 17 and 24 bulkheads and "X" turret, cable and accelerator gear were put out of action. During the same attack NUBIAN was hit right aft and had her stern blown off but she was still able to proceed at 20 knots.

67. Intelligence had shown that the Germans were using Melos harbour as an assembly point for craft to invade Crete. Orders had been given to Vice Admiral 1st Battle Squadron to detach D.14 with NUBIAN, KANDAHAR and JANUS to raid Melos harbour during the night of 26th/27th May. AJAX and DIDO were also to have been detached from Force A to make a feint as though intending to pass Kaso Strait at 2200/26th and then return to Alexandria after dark. The signal from the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, ordering these movements reached Vice Admiral 1st Battle Squadron during a bombing attack and at a time when he was occupied with the damage to FORMIDABLE. When the Vice Admiral saw the signal he considered it was too late for D.14 to attack Milo and be clear south of Crete by daylight. He, therefore, cancelled both the operation and the feint. At 1719 the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean sent a signal which also cancelled the Melos operation.

68. After dark FORMIDABLE with VOYAGER, VENDETTA, HERWARD and DECOY (who had joined at 2000) were detached from Force A so as to arrive Alexandria at daylight 27th May. The remainder of the force operated during the night to the north westward of Alexandria, and at daylight 27th May, proceeded towards Kaso to meet ABDIEL.

69. Although it was realised that there would be considerable risk in sending slow merchant ships to Crete it was so important to maintain supplies to the island that it was thought the attempt should be made. Convoy A.N.31, consisting of two ships, escorted by AUCLAND, left Alexandria at 0500/26th May. It was arranged for CALCUTTA and DEFENDER to join the convoy at 0600/27.

70. GLENROY, escorted by STUART, COVENTRY and JAGUAR had left Alexandria at 2000/25th May with a Battalion of the Queens Regiment. The force was subjected to bombing attacks by reconnaissance aircraft during the forenoon of 26th May. At 1820 there were two heavy dive bombing attacks by aircraft formations. One aircraft was shot down and one appeared to be damaged during these attacks. A final attack by low flying torpedo

bombers occurred at 2050. GLENROY avoided the torpedoes but received slight damage and 11 casualties from near misses and machine gun attacks. Three of her landing craft were holed and a large dump of cased petrol on the upper deck caught fire. The fire lasted for one and a half hours, during which time the ship had to steer south in order to bring the wind aft. One of the landing craft at the davits had to be cut adrift owing to the proximity of the flames. With 800 troops on board and a large cargo of petrol, GLENROY was in a nasty situation, but the fire was put out by 1950, when a northerly course for Crete was resumed. Half an hour later GLENROY decided that the operation of landing the troops at Tymbaki must be cancelled owing to shortness of time, reduction in available landing craft and unsuitable weather for landing on a beach. GLENROY and escort were accordingly turned back for Alexandria at 2115.

71. In Crete our troops were compelled to withdraw still further towards Suda and it was felt that it could not be long before the whole front in that sector collapsed.

Our troops in the Heraklion sector had fared better. Two of the "I" tanks landed by "A" Lighter Number 2 at Tymbaki and the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders landed at the same place by GLENGYLE had broken through from the south. The enemy had landed large numbers of men by parachute and troop carrier but had been successfully held at nearly all points.

72. During the night 26th/27th May, ABDIEL, HERO and NIZAM landed 750 Special Service Troops and Army stores in Suda Bay. This was the last reinforcement that was sent into the island. These ships left for Alexandria with 930 men who were not required in Crete.

27th May, 1941.

73. The naval situation at daylight on the 27th May was:—

(a) Force A, now consisting of QUEEN ELIZABETH, BARHAM, JERVIS, JANUS, KELVIN, NAPIER, KANDAHAR and HASTY, were about 250 miles south east of Kaso. (AJAX and DIDO were detached at 0600 to Alexandria).

(b) ABDIEL, HERO and NIZAM had disembarked troops at Suda and were on their way back to Alexandria via the Kaso Strait, carrying 930 personnel not wanted in Crete.

(c) AJAX and DIDO had been detached from Force A at 0600 and were returning to Alexandria in accordance with the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's original intention (see paragraph 67).

(d) AUCLAND with Convoy A.N.31 was about 150 miles north west of Alexandria, making for Crete.

(e) GLENROY and escort were returning to Alexandria.

74. From messages received from the General Officer Commanding, Crete, and the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Suda Bay, it was clear that the enemy had broken through our line defending Suda with great suddenness. Four days earlier the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Suda, had foreseen that this might happen and had taken a number of precautionary measures which would facilitate arrangements for evacuation.

75. Early in the forenoon, Convoy A.N.31, which was making for Suda Bay was ordered to turn back, as it was realised that it had no chance of reaching Crete under present conditions of air attacks.

76. Vice Admiral 1st Battle Squadron with Force A, less FORMIDABLE and escort, had been operating north west of Alexandria during the night 26th/27th May and at daylight on the 27th May were steering towards Kaso Strait to cover the return of ABDIEL, HERO and NIZAM. Vice Admiral 1st Battle Squadron's force now consisted of QUEEN ELIZABETH, BARHAM, JERVIS, JANUS, KELVIN, NAPIER and HASTY. At 0858 this force was attacked by 15 JU.88s and H.E.111s who appeared from the direction of the sun. BARHAM was hit on "Y" turret and two of her bulges were flooded by near misses. A fire was started in BARHAM and this necessitated the force steering down wind to the south until the fire was extinguished two hours later. Two aircraft were shot down and one was seen to be damaged by gunfire. At 1230, on receipt of instructions from the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, Vice Admiral 1st Battle Squadron shaped course for Alexandria, arriving there at 1900.

77. In a message timed 0824 of 27th May (0/67808 of 27th May), General Wavell informed the Prime Minister that he feared we must recognise that Crete was no longer tenable and that troops must be withdrawn as far as possible. The Chiefs of Staff (No. 118) replied that Crete was to be evacuated forthwith. Our troops in the Heraklion sector were still holding out, though it appeared only a matter of time before the enemy launched a major attack against them.

78. The Navy could claim to have prevented any seaborne invasion of Crete and to have kept the Army supplied with essential reinforcements of men and stores. The Royal Air Force, owing to circumstances beyond their control had so far been unable to give any direct help to the Navy. The fleet had inflicted considerable losses on the German troop-carrying convoys and had destroyed a number of enemy aircraft. Twenty enemy aircraft had been shot down for certain, with 11 probables. At least 15 aircraft appeared to have been damaged. But the losses and damage sustained by the fleet had been severe. Officers and men had been subjected to prolonged strain from the constant bombing. Little rest could be given, as a formidable task lay before the Fleet—the evacuation of some 22,000 men from Crete to Egypt.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 14th September, 1941, by Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham, G.C.B., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean.

Mediterranean.

14th September, 1941.

THE BATTLE OF CRETE.

PHASE IV—THE EVACUATION OF BRITISH AND IMPERIAL TROOPS FROM THE ISLAND.

Be pleased to lay before Their Lordships the attached reports of the Evacuation of Crete,

carried out between 26th May and 1st June, 1941.

2. The evacuation followed without intermission on the Battle of Crete when the fleet had sustained such severe losses and threw a final and almost intolerable strain on the light forces, most of whom had been operating at sea almost continuously since the beginning of Operation "Lustre" on 4th March, 1941.

3. Only one of the evacuations, that from Heraklion (paragraphs 6 and 7)†, could be made from a port with any facilities at all. All the remainder had to be taken from the small open beach at Sphakia (paragraphs 18 to 24, 31, 33, 34, 45 and 46) to which access from the land was difficult and slow. This, together with the disorganisation resulting from the events previously described, led to a constant fluctuation in the forecast of numbers to be embarked and made both the organisation and performance of the evacuation most difficult.

4. In view of the confusion and uncertainty of the situation in Crete and the extemporary nature of the arrangements for the embarkation, Major General J. F. Evetts, C.B., C.B.E., M.C., was sent from the General Headquarters, Middle East, to act as Military Liaison Officer on my staff. His judgment and co-operation were invaluable.

At the same time an organisation was set up in the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's offices for the co-ordination of fighter protection at sea. Group Captain C. B. R. Pelly, Royal Air Force, was sent from the Headquarters, Royal Air Force, Middle East, to undertake this organisation which, under his able management, pulled rapidly into shape and undoubtedly saved us many casualties.‡

5. The first day of the evacuation was not encouraging. In the evacuation of Heraklion, Rear Admiral H. B. Rawlings, O.B.E., the Rear Admiral Commanding, Seventh Cruiser Squadron, was faced with many difficult decisions. It was unfortunate that H.M.S. AJAX was not retained with Force B and much overcrowding thereby avoided, but the slight nature of her damage was not apparent to the Rear Admiral Commanding, Seventh Cruiser Squadron. Subsequent examination in harbour of damage sustained by H.M.S. AJAX revealed that the reports given to the Commanding Officer at the time were exaggerated and the ship could have well carried on with Force B.

6. The actual embarkation from Heraklion was most expeditiously carried out and reflected credit on all concerned both ashore and afloat.

* Footnote: Operation "Lustre" was the transport of the Army to Greece.

† Footnote: References are to paragraphs in the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's narrative.

‡ Footnote: Air Ministry comment:—The general air situation remained much the same with one important difference. The bulk of the troops were evacuated from bays in southern Crete during the hours of darkness and it was possible to provide some limited fighter cover to ships which, by first light, had proceeded some way towards the Egyptian mainland. Even then, the ranges from our airfields and the small number of aircraft available allowed no margin in hand to deal with changes in the routing or timing of naval operations which were necessitated by enemy action.

7. The breakdown of H.M.S. IMPERIAL's steering gear was a bitter misfortune which carried disaster in its train. The handling of H.M.S. HOTSPUR in embarking and carrying a total of 900 men must have been admirable.

8. As a direct result of this delay, Force B and the Royal Air Force fighters failed to make contact at daylight. The force was consequently exposed, starting only a few miles from the enemy's air base in Scarpanto, to the full weight of enemy air attack without any air support, until the first of our fighters eventually gained contact at 1200.

The consequence of this unhampered onslaught of aircraft was the loss of H.M.S. HERWARD and the damage to H.M.S. ORION and H.M.S. DIDO (paragraphs 10 to 15). The difficult decision to leave H.M.S. HERWARD to her fate was undoubtedly correct, and it is at least some consolation that a large proportion of those on board survived.

9. This disastrous voyage left the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, in a most unpleasant quandary. Of the 4,000 troops embarked in Force B no less than 800 had been killed, wounded or captured, after leaving Crete. If this was to be the scale of casualties, it appeared that, quite apart from our own prospective losses of ships and men, who could ill be spared, our efforts to rescue the Army from capture might only lead to the destruction of a large proportion of the troops. It was only after long and anxious consideration that the decision to continue the evacuation could be taken.

10. The decision to continue, once taken, was amply justified, for the remainder of the evacuation proceeded almost without casualty to personnel. Fighter protection became steadily more effective and the enemy less enterprising: his failure to interfere with the nightly embarkation at Sphakia was most surprising, and reminiscent of the Greek evacuation.

11. Vice Admiral E. L. S. King, C.B., M.V.O., the Vice Admiral Commanding, Fifteenth Cruiser Squadron, carried out two successful evacuations, embarking large numbers of troops each time on the nights of 29th/30th May and the final night 31st May/1st June (paragraphs 31, 45 and 46). On the first occasion we were fortunate that, although H.M.A.S. PERTH was hit and damaged, H.M.S. GLENGYLE escaped unscathed with her load of some 3,000 men. The landing craft she carried to Crete on this occasion were invaluable at this and subsequent embarkations.

12. The achievement of Captain S. H. T. Arliss, Royal Navy, the Captain (D), Seventh Destroyer Flotilla, in H.M.A.S. NAPIER in embarking 700 men each in H.M.A.S. NAPIER and H.M.A.S. NIZAM on the night 30th May/31st May was noteworthy (paragraphs 33 and 34). He had been deprived, by defects and damage, of two of his force, but accomplished his task without any reduction in the numbers to be embarked.

13. The loss of H.M.S. CALCUTTA on the 1st June, only a hundred miles from Alexandria, came as a final blow (paragraph 49). This fine little ship had a record of arduous service and gallant endeavour in the

face of air attack which must be almost unsurpassed in the Royal Navy. She fell, it may almost be said to "a bow drawn at a venture" and the Mediterranean Fleet is the poorer by her loss.

Captain W. P. Carne, Royal Navy, in H.M.S. COVENTRY had an anxious time recovering her survivors and did well to save so many.

14. The decision to attempt no further evacuation on the night 1st/2nd June (paragraph 51) was made with the greatest reluctance, but with dwindling forces and men and machinery at the point of exhaustion, a further attempt when the forces had already been ordered to surrender could not be justified. It was particularly galling that a large proportion of the men left to surrender consisted of the Royal Marines, who had fought so gallant a rearguard action.

15. Where so much fine service was performed it is difficult, as ever, to pick out individual acts of merit. Reference must be made however to the fearless judgment and gallant bearing of Rear Admiral H. B. Rawlings, O.B.E., the Rear Admiral Commanding, Seventh Cruiser Squadron in extricating his shattered squadron on the 29th May and in bringing it safely to harbour.

The co-operation and understanding of Major General J. F. Evetts, C.B., C.B.E., M.C., who was attached to me for the evacuation period, were a source of great strength at this time. Group Captain C. B. R. Pelly's untiring zeal was of the utmost value.

16. The bearing and discipline of officers and men of all services in this ordeal was a source of inspiration. In particular the behaviour of men in the crowded ships of Force B on the 29th May was most notable in the face of the hammering they endured.

17. I had occasion to remark at the conclusion of my despatch on the first phases of the Battle of Crete, that I never felt prouder of the Mediterranean Fleet except during those trials which it was about to undergo. The trials in question are described in this narrative of the final phase.

It is not easy to convey how heavy was the strain that men and ships sustained. Apart from the cumulative effect of prolonged seagoing over extended periods it has to be remembered that in this last instance ships' companies had none of the inspiration of battle with the enemy to bear them up. Instead they had the unceasing anxiety of the task of trying to bring away in safety, thousands of their own countrymen, many of whom were in an exhausted and dispirited condition, in ships necessarily so overcrowded that even when there was opportunity to relax conditions made this impossible. They had started the evacuation already over tired and they had to carry it through under conditions of savage air attack such as had only recently caused grievous losses in the fleet.

There is rightly little credit or glory to be expected in these operations of retreat but I feel that the spirit of tenacity shown by those who took part should not go unrecorded.

More than once I felt that the stage had been reached when no more could be asked of officers and men, physically and mentally exhausted by their efforts and by the events of these fateful

weeks. It is perhaps even now not realised how nearly the breaking point was reached, but that these men struggled through is the measure of their achievement and I trust that it will not lightly be forgotten.

(Signed) A. B. CUNNINGHAM.
Admiral.

*Commander-in-Chief,
Mediterranean.*

THE BATTLE OF CRETE

NARRATIVE BY THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF,
MEDITERRANEAN.

PHASE IV—THE EVACUATION OF THE BRITISH AND IMPERIAL FORCES FROM THE ISLAND.

After a battle which had lasted eight days, it was decided that our troops were not any longer in a position to resist effectively and must be evacuated. So far, the Mediterranean Fleet had already lost two cruisers and four destroyers besides having the aircraft carrier, two battleships, one cruiser and one destroyer virtually out of action. Another five cruisers and four destroyers had suffered minor damage, which did not, however, greatly affect their steaming powers or fighting efficiency. The fleet was now given the task of attempting to evacuate some 22,000 men, mostly from an open beach on the south coast of Crete, 360 miles from the fleet base at Alexandria.

2. Up to date the fleet had been required to operate without fighter protection (except for the brief period on the 26th May, when FORMIDABLE's fighters were available). On the 27th May, a message was received from the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Royal Air Force, Middle East, stating that the Royal Air Force would do all possible to provide some fighter cover for ships but owing to the distance from our bases, the cover would only be meagre and spasmodic (H.Q.R.A.F., M.E. A.458 of 27th May, time of origin 1718 of 27th May). Group Captain C. B. R. Pelly from R.A.F.H.Q., M.E. was attached temporarily to the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's staff at Alexandria, in order to co-ordinate fighter protection with the movement of fleet units.

3. Throughout the evacuation, great difficulty was experienced in finding out the exact numbers to be removed on each night. This sometimes resulted in the ships not being quite filled to capacity and sometimes in not enough ships being sent.

4. The method adopted in allocating ships was as follows:—

The numbers to be taken off and the embarkation points would generally be signalled by "CREFORCE", the General Officer Commanding, Troops in Crete. The initial estimate of numbers, which proved to be substantially correct, was given by the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Suda Bay. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, after consulting Major General J. F. Evetts, C.B., C.B.E., M.C. (who was acting as his Military Liaison Officer) would decide on the number of ships to be sent.

The original plan for bringing off troops was as follows:—

(a) Troops from the Maleme-Suda Bay area were to come off from Sphakia

(b) Troops from the Retimo area were to come off from Plaka Bay.

(c) Troops from the Heraklion area were to be taken off from Heraklion harbour.

(d) A small number of troops who were cut off to the south of Heraklion were expected to make their way to Tymbaki.

(e) Evacuation was invariably to be carried out at night, usually between the hours of midnight and 0300. This allowed ships to be as far as possible from enemy air bases during daylight hours.

(f) Ashore in Crete, the evacuation was to be covered by troops fighting a rearguard action from the Suda Bay area to the south coast. Major General E. C. Weston, Royal Marines, was placed in charge of the rearguard.

5. It was decided that the main evacuation on the night of 28th/29th May should be from Heraklion. It will be recalled that on the 23rd May the enemy had delivered an ultimatum to the Heraklion garrison to surrender, but this had been rejected by the British and Greek Commanders. During the ensuing days the enemy were re-inforced continuously by troop-carrying planes. In spite of this the garrison held out, delivered counter attacks and inflicted severe losses on the enemy right up to the time of evacuation.

28th/29th May, 1941.

6. At 0600 on the 28th May, Force B, consisting of C.S.7 in ORION with AJAX, DIDO, DECOY, JACKAL, IMPERIAL, HOTSPUR, KIMBERLEY and HEReward, left Alexandria to evacuate the Heraklion garrison. Force B was about 90 miles from Scarpanto at 1700 and from then until dark was subjected to a series of air attacks, consisting of high level bombing, dive bombing and torpedo attack. At 1920 IMPERIAL was near missed but at the time appeared to be undamaged. At 2100 AJAX had a close miss which started a small fire, seriously wounded twenty men and caused slight damage to the ship's side. In view of the need for ships to be fully efficient to carry out the night evacuation and to cope with the almost certain air attacks on the following day, C.S.7, after receiving a report of the damage from AJAX, decided that she should return to Alexandria. Shortly after 2100, C.S.7 gave orders accordingly.

7. After passing through the Kaso Strait and turning to the westward, Force B was attacked by a torpedo plane, without result. The force arrived off Heraklion at 2330. The destroyers immediately entered harbour to embark troops from the jetties and ferry them to the cruiser outside. By 0245 the ferrying was complete and by 0300 KIMBERLEY and IMPERIAL had embarked the rearguard. At 0320 the force proceeded at 20 knots, having embarked the whole of Heraklion garrison, amounting to some 4,000 troops. Twenty-five minutes later IMPERIAL's steering gear failed and she narrowly missed colliding with both cruisers. This could scarcely have happened at a more inopportune time since it was essential to be as far from enemy air bases as possible by daylight. C.S.7 was faced with the difficult decision whether to wait in the hope that the steering gear could be repaired or to sink the IMPERIAL and carry on.

8. On hearing that IMPERIAL was quite unable to steer, C.S.7 reduced speed of his force to 15 knots and gave HOTSPUR orders to take off all IMPERIAL's troops and crew and then sink her. This was successfully accomplished at 0445 and HOTSPUR, who now had a total of 900 men onboard, rejoined the squadron just after daylight.

9. The delay over IMPERIAL had caused Force B to be an hour and a half late on their timetable and it was not until sunrise that they turned to the southward through the Kaso Strait. Air attacks began at 0600 and continued at intervals until 1500 when Force B was within 100 miles of Alexandria.

10. At 0625 HEReward was hit by a bomb which caused her to reduce speed and fall away from her position on the screen. The force was now in the middle of Kaso Strait and C.S.7 again had to make the difficult decision whether to wait, in order to assist HEReward or to leave her behind. He decided that to wait would be to invite further casualties. As HEReward could then be seen making for Crete, which was only five miles away, C.S.7 proceeded on his way. HEReward was last seen making slowly towards the island, with her guns engaging enemy aircraft.

11. Arrangements had been made for fighter protection to be provided at 0530 in the Kaso Strait and C.S.7 had corrected, by signal, his time of arrival in the Strait to 0630. It is believed that the fighters did reach the Strait at the corrected time but they were unable to make contact with the ships.

12. At 0645 DECOY reported fractured turbine feet and circulator damage, as the result of a near miss. This caused the speed of the squadron to be reduced to 25 knots. At 0700 a very close miss on ORION caused a further reduction to 21 knots.

13. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, realised from C.S.7's signals that our fighters had not yet appeared and every endeavour was made to put this right. It is probable, however, that the aircraft had navigational difficulties as they were unable to make contact with the ships until 1200. By this time the force had suffered severely. At 0735 the Flag Captain in the ORION (Captain G. R. B. Back, Royal Navy) had been severely wounded by an explosive bullet from a JU.87 and he died two hours later. At 0815 DIDO was hit on "B" turret and three quarters of an hour later ORION was hit on "A" turret, both by bombs from JU.87s. In each case the turrets were put out of action. At 1045 ORION was again attacked by 11 JU.87s and a bomb passed through her bridge putting the lower conning tower out of action. The force was then about 100 miles from Kaso and this was the last attack to be made by the JU.87s.

14. The ORION had nearly 1,100 troops on board and the casualties on the crowded mess-decks were very heavy. Three of the Engineer Officers were killed, all normal communication between bridge and engine room was destroyed, the steering gear was put out of action and three boiler rooms were damaged. It is believed that a total of 260 were killed and 280 wounded.

15. ORION was out of control until the after steering wheel could be connected and a chain of men arranged to pass orders from the Emergency Conning Position to the wheel. Owing to contamination of the oil fuel with salt water, ORION'S speed varied between 12 and 25 knots but she was able to average about 21 knots.

16. There was a lull in the air attacks until about 1300 when there was a high level attack followed by another at 1330 and a final one at 1500. The first and only friendly fighters to be seen were two Naval Fulmars which appeared at noon. Royal Air Force squadrons had made several attempts to find our ships and in the course of a number of engagements, had shot down two JU.88s for the loss of one Hurricane. One JU.87 was shot down by ships' gunfire.

17. The force arrived at Alexandria at 2000 on the 29th May, ORION having only ten tons of fuel and two rounds of 6" H.E. ammunition remaining.

18. Whilst the troops were being taken off at Heraklion, destroyers were withdrawing a smaller party from Sphakia on the south coast of Crete.

19. Sphakia is a small fishing village with one shingle beach, of which a stretch less than a cable in extent could be used for embarking in boats. The road over the mountains from Suda to Sphakia finished up with a series of acute hairpin bends and came to an abrupt termination at the top of a 500 foot high escarpment. From this point a precipitous goat track led down to the village. It was necessary for the troops to remain hidden from air observation until actually called forward to embark. Touch between the beach area and the top of the escarpment had to be maintained on foot as there was no signal communication. The climb required at least two hours to complete.

20. The Headquarters of the General Officer Commanding, Troops in Crete and the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Suda, had been shifted to a cave near Sphakia. The portable W/T sets and naval cyphers, which the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Suda, had previously sent in M.L.1011 from Suda to Sphakia, had gone down with the ship on the 24th May, as a result of air attack. A second W/T set was sent by lorry to Sphakia but as this set was damaged, the Royal Air Force W/T set at the Sphakia Headquarters was used for outside naval communications.

21. Force C consisting of D.7 in NAPIER with NIZAM, KELVIN and KANDAHAR had left Alexandria, at 0800 on the 28th May after embarking additional whalers and some provisions and small arms for the troops ashore. After an uneventful passage, the force arrived off Sphakia and started the embarkation at 0030/29th May.

22. The embarkation was completed by 0300/29th May by which time the four destroyers had embarked nearly 700 troops and had landed badly needed rations for 15,000. Soon after 0900 on the 29th May, Force C was attacked by four JU.88s and NIZAM suffered minor damage from a near miss. Fighter protection for Force C had been arranged from 0545/29th May and at 0940 a crashed enemy aircraft was sighted, probably shot down by

fighters. The remainder of the passage was uneventful, Force C arriving Alexandria at 1700 on the 29th May.

23. At 2100 on the 28th May, Force D, consisting of C.S.15 in PHOEBE, with PERTH, GLENGYLE, CALCUTTA, COVENTRY, JERVIS, JANUS and HASTY left Alexandria for Sphakia, where they were to embark troops during the night 29th/30th May.

24. During the night 28th/29th May a message was received from the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Suda at Sphakia saying that up to 10,000 troops would be available for evacuation on the following night but another message was received from CREFORCE stating that it was unlikely that the troops could hold out until the night 30th/31st May. CREFORCE thought that "an optimistic view" of the fighting troops which could be evacuated, was under 2,000 but there would be a number of stragglers (CREFORCE 0.672 timed 1310 of 28th May). It was deduced from these two signals that the situation in Crete was very bad but that 10,000 troops remained to be evacuated. Of these, only 2,000 would be in organised bodies. The night 29th/30th May, would have to be the last night for evacuation.

29th/30th May, 1941.

25. A Royal Air Force aircraft had been sent to drop a message over Retimo ordering the garrison to withdraw to Plaka Bay on the south coast. This aircraft, however, did not return and CREFORCE reported that he could not guarantee that the troops had received the message. As they had no supplies it was doubtful whether they would be able to reach the coast. It was, therefore, decided to send ships to Sphakia only for the evacuation but 1,200 rations were dropped by air on Plaka Bay.

26. On the 29th May, Major General J. F. Evetts, C.B., C.B.E., M.C., flew to Cairo from Alexandria to explain the naval situation and to discuss the question of further evacuation with General Wavell. After consulting General Blamey and Air Marshal Tedder, General Wavell sent a personal message to the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, saying that it was thought that "GLEN" ships and cruisers ought not to be risked any more but that destroyers should continue the evacuation (MID-EAST 0/18491 of 29th May).

27. In a "Most Immediate" message to the Admiralty the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, summarised the situation regarding the evacuation up to date. Three cruisers and one destroyer had already been damaged and casualties to the closely packed troops on board amounted to some 500. Further heavy casualties to men must be expected on the following day, especially if GLENGYLE was hit with 3,000 troops on board. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, asked if he was justified in accepting a scale of loss and damage to his already weakened fleet. He was, however, ready and willing to continue the evacuation as long as a ship remained to do so, realising that it was against all tradition to leave troops deliberately in enemy hands (the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's message timed 1305 of 29th May, to Admiralty).

28. A reply from the Admiralty was received at 2026/29th ordering GLENGYLE to turn back and the remaining ships to proceed (Ad-

miralty message timed 1900 of the 29th May to the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean). The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, however, considered that it was then too late to turn the GLENGYLE back and he informed the Admiralty accordingly, adding that three extra destroyers, with no troops on board, were being sent to meet GLENGYLE (the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's message timed 2147 of 29th May to Admiralty). The Admiralty approved the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean's action (Admiralty message timed 0105 of 30th May to the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean).

29. Captain (D), Tenth Destroyer Flotilla in STUART, with JAGUAR and DEFENDER left Alexandria p.m. on the 29th May to join Force D. These destroyers had no troops and the intention was that in addition to providing extra protection to Force D they would be available to take troops off from any ship which might be damaged by air attack (see paragraph 28).

30. During the course of the day, General Evetts' Staff Officer, Colonel R. B. Jennings, had been able to interview a number of senior officers recently returned from Crete. As a result of these interviews coupled with the more hopeful signals which had recently come from CREFORCE and the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Suda, it became clear that the situation in Crete was not so desperate as had been thought. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, therefore, decided to send four destroyers to embark men on the night of 30th/31st May.

31. Meanwhile Force D, under C.S.15 were proceeding to Sphakia. At 1003 on the 29th May, a single JU.88 dropped a stick of bombs close to PERTH without result. GLENGYLE and the cruisers of Force D were anchored off Sphakia by 2330/29th whilst the A.A. cruisers and destroyers patrolled to seaward. The A.A. cruisers were not required to embark any troops but the destroyers closed in one at a time to embark their quota. The troops were ferried from the beach to the ships in GLENGYLE's landing craft, assisted by two Assault Landing Craft which had been carried in PERTH. The beach was too small for ships' boats to be used in addition. By 0320/30th a total of about 6,000 men had been embarked and Force D proceeded towards Alexandria. Three motor landing craft were left behind for use on subsequent nights.

30th/31st May, 1941.

32. At 0645/30th May, STUART, JAGUAR, and DEFENDER joined Force D to act as additional escort. There were three air attacks on the force during the passage to Alexandria. In the first of these at 0930, PERTH was hit and her foremost boiler room put out of action. In the second and third attacks there was no result although bombs fell very close to PERTH and JAGUAR. Some of our fighter patrols failed to make contact with Force D but the force was covered by two or three Royal Air Force fighters during most of the day. These fighters, on one occasion, drove off 20 JU.87s and JU.88s, and, in various engagements, shot down two H.E.111s and damaged a number of other enemy aircraft. In addition, one JU.88 was seen to be damaged by ships' gunfire.

33. At 0915/30th May, Force C consisting of D.7 in NAPIER, with NIZAM, KELVIN and KANDAHAR, left Alexandria for Sphakia, where they were to embark troops during the night 30th/31st May (see paragraph 31 above). At 1245, KANDAHAR developed a mechanical defect and was ordered to return to Alexandria. At 1530 three JU.88s carried out an unseen dive from astern of Force C causing damage to KELVIN from a near miss, reducing her speed to 20 knots. Captain (D), Seventh Destroyer Flotilla, therefore, ordered KELVIN back to Alexandria. Half an hour later Force D was sighted returning to Alexandria. C.S.15 was prepared to augment D.7's reduced force by detaching JAGUAR, but found that she was too short of fuel.

34. Force C arrived off Sphakia at 0030/31st May and commenced the embarkation of troops using the three motor landing craft which had been left behind on the previous night, supplemented by ships' boats. By 0300/31st May, NAPIER and NIZAM had embarked about 700 troops each and started on their return journey to Alexandria.

35. The usual fighter protection had been arranged and D.7 reports sighting friendly fighters at 0625. These Royal Air Force fighters claim to have shot down three JU.88s and one Cant 1007 during the day. One JU.88 was shot down by gunfire and three were damaged. From 0850 to 0915 Force C was attacked by about 12 JU.88s which were not seen before they dived in to the attack. As a result of the air attack, NAPIER sustained damage in the engine and boiler rooms from near misses, reducing her speed to 23 knots.

The force arrived at Alexandria at 1900/31st May.

36. Ashore in Crete, our troops had an anxious period when the enemy threatened to cut off their line of retreat, by placing himself astride the Stilos—Sphakia road. From the 29th May onwards, it appeared that the rear-guard, under Major General E. C. Weston, Royal Marines, was managing to carry out an orderly retreat. On the 30th May CREFORCE, whose Headquarters were at Sphakia, asked for one last lift to be taken off on the night 31st May/1st June, numbering up to 3,000. This represented a large increase over previous estimates. After consultation between the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, General Wavell and Major General Evetts, it was decided to inform CREFORCE that all available ships would be sent on the night 31st May/1st June but the maximum number that could be lifted would not exceed 2,000.

37. During the night 30th/31st May CREFORCE (Major General B. C. Freyberg, V.C., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.) acting on instructions from the General Headquarters, Middle East, embarked in a Sunderland flying boat at Sphakia and returned to Egypt. He was accompanied by the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Suda Bay (Captain J. A. V. Morse, D.S.O., Royal Navy), who had received similar instructions from the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean. Major General Weston, Royal Marines, was left in command of the troops in Crete.

38. A number of small naval craft had been employed on local defence duties in Crete. When the evacuation commenced all small craft fit to move were sailed to Alexandria. Those which had to be destroyed or beached in Suda Bay were KOS 23, WIDNES and Tank Landing Craft A. 16. Craft sunk by air attack on passage to Alexandria were M.L.1011, KOS 22 and SYVERN. Nothing is known of the fate of M.L.1030 and Tank Landing Craft A. 6 and A. 20, and it is presumed that they were sunk by enemy air action on passage. The only vessels of the original local defence flotilla to reach Alexandria were KOS 21, LANNER and M.L. 1032.

31st May/1st June, 1941.

39. At 0600/31st May, C.S.15 in PHOEBE, with ABDIEL, KIMBERLEY, HOTSPUR and JACKAL left Alexandria to carry out the final evacuation from Sphakia.

40. During the forenoon of the 31st May, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, received a message from Captain D.7, which indicated that there were roughly 6,500 more men to come off from Crete. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, accordingly authorised C.S.15 to increase the maximum number to be brought off to 3,500.

41. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, held a consultation on the 31st May with the Right Honourable Peter Fraser, P.C. (Prime Minister of New Zealand), General Wavell, Major General Freyberg and General Evetts. As a result of this consultation, it appeared that the force under C.S.15 now on its way to Sphakia would be able to bring away the majority of troops assembled there. A message was therefore sent to C.S.15 ordering him to fill up his ships to capacity. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, informed the Admiralty that he had called a halt to evacuation after the night 31st May/1st June. Even if C.S.15's force suffered no damage on the return trip, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean would be left with a fleet of only two battleships, one cruiser, two A.A. cruisers, ABDIEL and nine destroyers, fit for service.

42. At about 2000 on the 31st May, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean received a message from the General Headquarters, Middle East, which he was asked to pass on to Major General Weston in Crete. It was a personal message from General Wavell to Major General Weston informing him that this was the last night that evacuation could take place and authorising the capitulation of any troops who had to be left behind. As the transmission of this message would mean an irrevocable decision to cease the evacuation, it was given careful consideration before the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean finally decided to send it on.

43. At about 2030 on the 31st May, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean received a message from General Blamey, who was perturbed at the small number of Australians so far taken out of Crete and asking for a ship to be sent to Plaka where he believed a number of our troops had assembled. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, replied that at this late hour it was not possible to alter the destination of the ships.

44. During the passage to Sphakia, C.S.15's force was attacked by aircraft on three occasions between 1825/31st May and 1905/31st May. None of the bombs fell very close and it was believed that one JU.88 was damaged. Many bombs were seen to be jettisoned on the horizon, indicating successful combats by our fighter aircraft.

45. C.S.15 arrived at Sphakia at 2320/31st. Three fully loaded M.L.C.s which had been left behind from the previous evacuation, immediately went alongside the ships, thus saving a valuable 40 minutes. The embarkation proceeded so quickly that for a time the beach was empty of troops. This was unfortunate, as it caused a last minute rush of troops, some of whom had necessarily to be left behind.

46. Some medical stores were landed by the ships and finally the three M.L.C.s were sunk or disabled. The force sailed at 0300 on the 1st June, having embarked nearly 4,000 troops.

47. During the night 31st May/1st June, Major General Weston, acting on instructions from the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, embarked in a Sunderland flying boat at Sphakia and returned to Egypt.

48. Before leaving Sphakia, General Weston handed written orders to the Senior British Army Officer remaining behind, to come to terms with the enemy. Among those left behind were many who had taken part in a gallant rearguard action, which had enabled others to get away from the island. Included in the rearguard, who were left behind, were a large number of the Special Service Troops landed as a final reinforcement at Suda and many Royal Marines of the M.N.B.D.O. Of the 2,000 Royal Marines employed in Crete, only 1,000 got back to Egypt.

49. In order to provide additional protection to C.S. 15's force, the A.A. cruisers CALCUTTA and COVENTRY were sailed from Alexandria early on the 1st June to rendezvous with the returning ships. At 0900 aircraft were detected by R.D.F. approaching from the north, and at 0917 the ships hoisted the red warning. It was unfortunate that an "up sun" barrage was not then fired as five minutes later two JU. 88s dived on the cruisers from the direction of the sun. A stick of bombs from the first machine just missed COVENTRY but two bombs from the second machine hit CALCUTTA, who settled fast and sank within a few minutes. COVENTRY was able to pick up 23 officers and 232 men with whom she at once returned to Alexandria.

50. The force with C.S. 15 had an uneventful passage to Alexandria where they arrived at 1700 on the 1st June.

51. In the early hours of the 1st June the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, received a message from the First Sea Lord, stating that if there was a reasonable prospect of embarking any substantially formed body of men on the night 1st/2nd June he thought the attempt should be made. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, replied that General Weston had returned with the report that the 5,000 troops remaining in Crete were incapable of further resistance owing to strain and lack of food. The troops had, therefore, been instructed to capitulate. In the circumstances, no more ships would be sent.

52. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, later sent a subsequent message to the Admiralty in which he pointed out that the only ships available for an evacuation on the night 1st/2nd June were two battleships and five destroyers. The remaining ships were either damaged or too slow. Fighter protection for the ships was thin and irregular. In view of the situation developing in the Western Desert and Syria any further reduction in the strength of the fleet was out of the question.

53. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, informed the Admiralty that with C.S. 15's arrival, the evacuation had terminated. He drew attention to the fact that owing to the inevitable confusion, the figures given to him for evacuation varied very greatly. Up to late on the 30th May, he had hoped that the last trip, that of C.S. 15, would result in almost everyone being brought off. The figures, however, suddenly increased by 5,000 on that day.

54. The Battle of Crete was now ended, and the Mediterranean Fleet could claim to have played a worthy part. The Royal Air Force had given what little protection was possible to the fleet; operating their aircraft far out to sea to the limit of their endurance. Whilst the land fighting was in progress, the fleet had landed reinforcements for the Army and had prevented any seaborne invasion from taking place. When orders were given for the troops to be withdrawn, some 17,000 British and Imperial troops were brought safely back to Egypt and provisions and stores were landed for those who had to be left behind. The Royal Marines, after manning the island's defences, fought gallantly with the rearguard and had to leave half their number behind. The Mediterranean Fleet paid a heavy price for this achievement. Losses and damage were sustained which would normally only occur during a major fleet action, in which the enemy fleet might be expected to suffer greater losses than our own. In this case the enemy fleet did not appear (though it had many favourable opportunities for doing so) and the battle was fought between ships and aircraft.

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