

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.