

uncertain, 2 power boats, at least 2 skoots, CALCUTTA, GALLANT, WAKEFUL, VERITY, and GRAFTON, using what survived of their own whalers and motor boats. This force was reinforced by 2 minesweepers at 2115. Later reports of concentrations of troops on the beaches were received, particularly at La Panne and Bray. Craft approaching the coast were directed accordingly. Naval Officer-in-Charge, Ramsgate, was requested to maintain a continuous evacuation service by skoots between Margate and Ramsgate and the beach, and take over responsibility for servicing those vessels. Meantime CALCUTTA, who was off La Panne, reported that conditions for embarkation there were very bad owing to heavy surf, but that they might improve with the rising tide.

Shortly after midnight CALCUTTA was informed that the Third Corps of the B.E.F. and the Commander-in-Chief were all now at La Panne. She was directed to make every endeavour to concentrate all destroyers and light craft at that end of the beach with the object of embarking that force as soon as possible.

19. As regards enemy activity, this day the Germans contented themselves with bombing the town and port of Dunkirk, but on a small scale compared with that to be experienced later, probably because of increasing R.A.F. air cover and also due to the fact that a heavy pall of smoke from the burning town covered the operation most of the day.

Wednesday 29th May.

20. The Northern Route Y having been swept, it was arranged to sail personnel ships to Dunkirk at daylight and to continue to sail throughout the day; this route would take ships clear of the artillery fire on shore. Personnel ships accordingly started at 0230.

21. Much consideration had been given to the practicability of building piers on the beaches using lines of barges. Reports from ships that worked off the beaches showed, however, that owing to the very gradual shoaling of the water at all states of the tide such a barge pier to be effective, would have to be of very great length, beyond the resources available.

22. Information was received that the personnel vessels with their Mercantile Marine crews were having difficulty in making the entrance to Dunkirk Harbour in the face of the navigational difficulties caused by a heavy smoke pall over the entrance and in face of bombing and shelling encountered en route and whilst alongside. Nevertheless it subsequently transpired that at Dunkirk there had been a good number of ships throughout the night, at times exceeding the influx of troops.

23. S.N.O. Dunkirk, and other Senior Officers on the Coast reported during the early hours that surf on the beaches was retarding boat work. S.N.O. Dunkirk, at 0709, asked for all ships to go to Dunkirk. The Vice-Admiral could not accept this as it was essential to maintain lifts off the beaches as well as from Dunkirk Harbour, both from the aspect of the military situation and from the fact that Dunkirk was limited by a bottle-neck, formed by the narrow gangway along the East Pier to the points of embarkation. Furthermore, there was

every prospect of the weather improving and the surf reducing as the tide rose. Nevertheless, an increased number of H.M. Ships was ordered to Dunkirk to augment the personnel vessels, though it was feared that an accumulation of ships alongside the East Pier at Dunkirk by day might well invite intensive air attacks. Subsequently, this fear was fully to be justified.

24. Meantime, considerable anxiety was felt as to the fate of the personnel vessels which had been despatched in a steady stream to Dunkirk commencing the previous evening. The first of these was due back at Dover about 0300, but by 0900 nothing had been sighted or reported. But at 0700, S.N.O. Dunkirk had reported that the embarkation there was going on at the rate of 2,000 an hour, so it was presumed that the transports had failed to enter the harbour during darkness, had waited outside, and had commenced to enter in succession at dawn. The necessity for continuous fighter protection in view of the exposure of these unarmed ships while at Dunkirk and during the daylight passage through coastal waters, was obvious. Constant touch was maintained with the R.A.F. Commands to obtain continuous fighter protection during the hours when the Vice-Admiral, Dover, estimated the largest concentration of vessels would be present, it being realised that the R.A.F. resources were not sufficient to provide continuous air cover, and to dispense with full cover at less important periods.

25. At 0930 the belated return of the personnel vessels from Dunkirk commenced, and proceeded steadily through the day. In addition to the personnel vessels using Dunkirk the Admiralty were informed of the necessity for X-lighters and other self-propelled lighters to increase the facilities for beach evacuation. A Medical Party was shipped in VERITY for use on the beaches, and a Naval Medical Party was sent to Dunkirk.

26. The considerable alarm as to the immediate safety of the B.E.F. felt during the evening and early night of the 28th, which caused all available resources to be immediately concentrated on the French Coast, eased during the 29th. But emergency measures taken late on the 28th had an adverse effect on the orderly organisation for evacuation so necessary if effective measures were to be devised and put in force.

27. Meantime, in the early hours of the 29th, an unfortunate disaster occurred involving the loss of H.M. Destroyers WAKEFUL and GRAFTON, and the danlayer COMFORT. WAKEFUL, after embarking troops at Bray, sailed for Dover at 2300/28 by the Zuydecoote Pass and North Channel. Approaching the Kwinte Whistle Buoy the speed of the ships was 20 knots, and a zigzag of 40 degrees every four minutes was started. At 0045 two torpedo tracks were observed, one torpedo missed, the other hit amidships. WAKEFUL broke in half and the two portions sank in 15 seconds, each remaining standing with the midship end on the bottom. All the troops on board went down with the ship; certain of the crew floated clear. After about half-an-hour motor drifters NAUTILUS and COMFORT arrived and started to pick up survivors, later joined by GOSSAMER. Captain of WAKEFUL was in the COMFORT. GRAFTON and LYDD were close and Captain of WAKEFUL warned