

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 time table 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