

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. HEReward 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. HEReward 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 sea-going 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