

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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