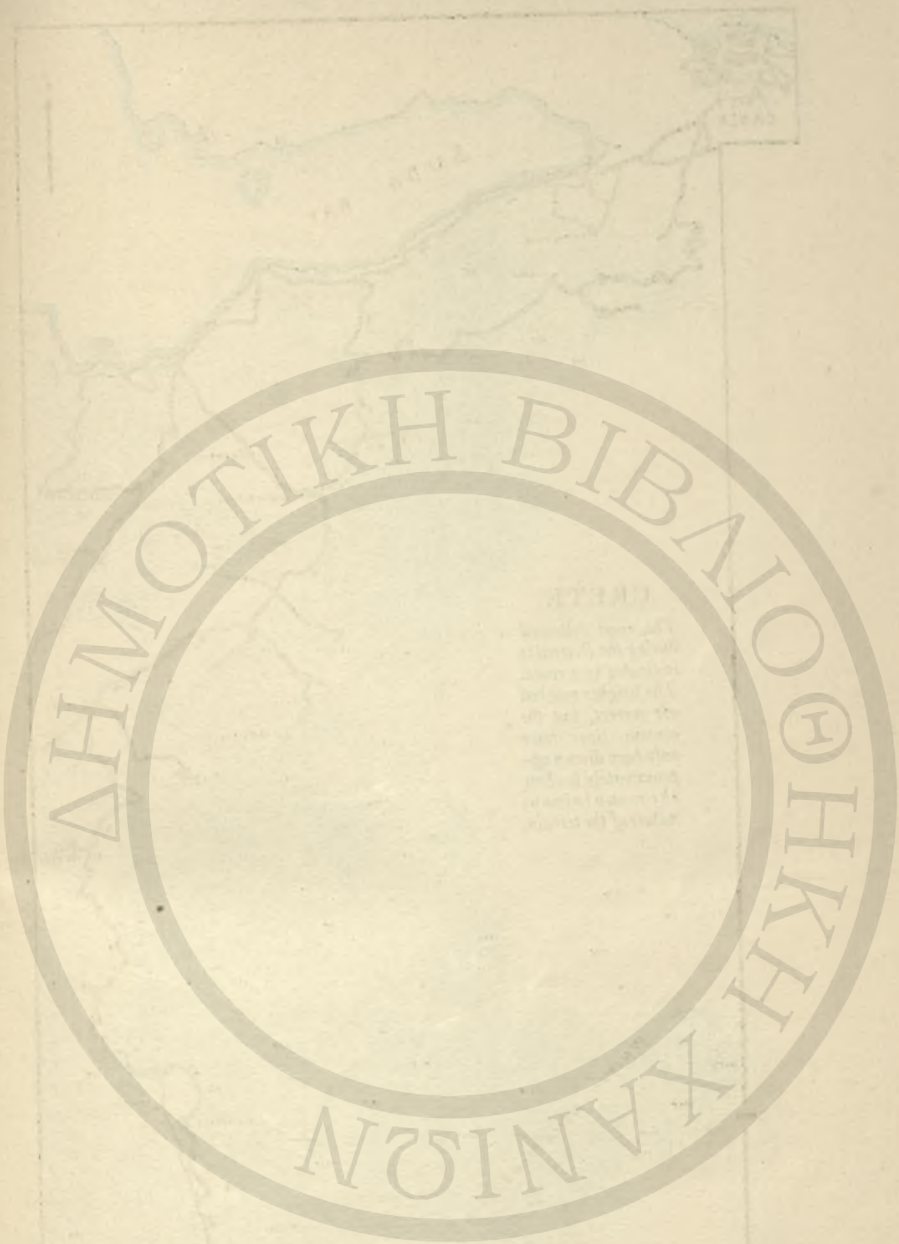
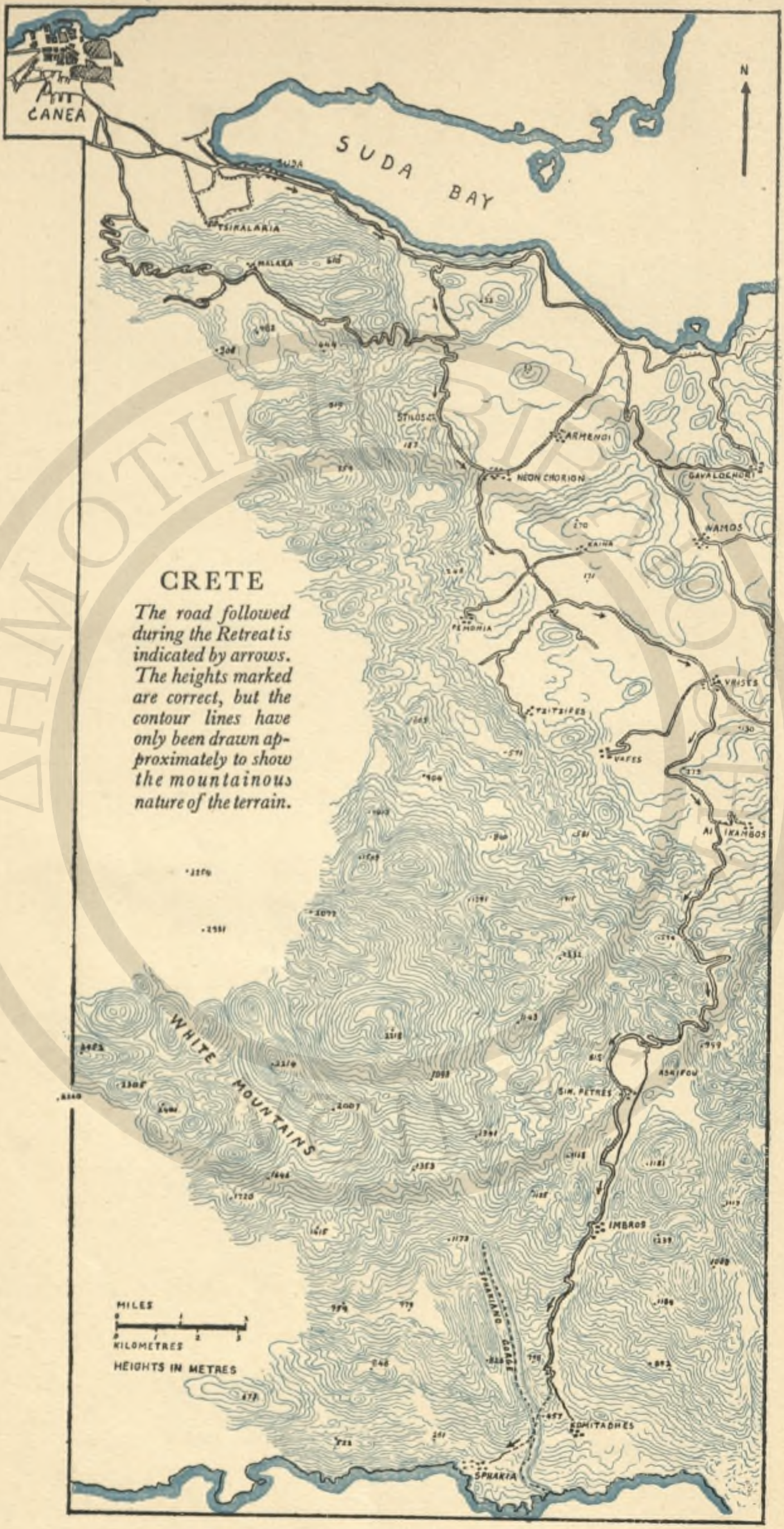
To Mr. I.D. Mourellos
With the author's best compliments,
Th. Stephanides
Jan. 1948.

Climax in Crete




CANEA
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PEMONIA
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VRISES
VAFES
AI KAMBOS
CRETE
The road followed during the Retreat is indicated by arrows. The heights marked are correct, but the contour lines have only been drawn approximately to show the mountainous nature of the terrain.
WHITE MOUNTAINS
ASKIFOU
SIN. PETRES
IMBROS
GORGE
KOMITADHES
SPHAKIA
MILES
KILOMETRES
HEIGHTS IN METRES

CLIMAX IN CRETE

by

THEODORE STEPHANIDES

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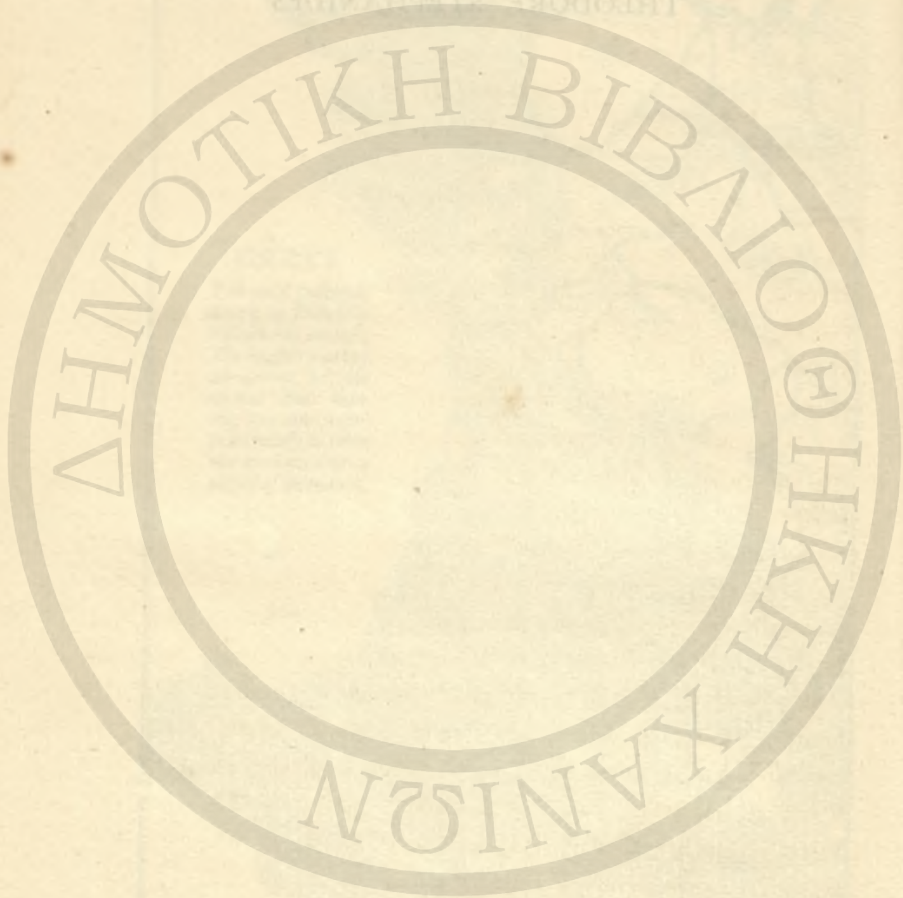

Foreword

This sober and factual account of war experience in Greece and Crete can claim none of the journalistic virtues of immediate topicality, sensationalism, or inaccuracy. It was not written for publication, and it is completely free from literary inflation of any kind. But for clearness, accuracy, and unselfconsciousness it is quite fit to rank beside the compilations of any modern Purchas.

Its author is a doctor; born of Greek and English parents in India towards the end of the last century, he was educated in France and Greece. For many years past he has devoted himself to his practice as a radiologist in the island of Corfu—perhaps the most beautiful of all Greece's islands. The author of many specialized treatises, chiefly on the subject of freshwater biology, he has also written a great deal on literary subjects. His perfect knowledge of Greek has enabled him to be the first modern translator of Palamas and other modern Greek poets; while his studies in folklore and myth go side by side with his studies in science.

Attached to the R.A.M.C. throughout the campaigns of Libya, Greece, and Crete, the following selection from

his diary, edited by himself, gives an account of his adventures during the tragic Cretan campaign. It is not the smart, ill-informed writing of the so-called 'trained reporter', nor the shredded gossip of the American woman journalist; it is so bare and unassuming a narrative as to appear in places deliberately underwritten. Yet in the solid virtue of observed detail it evokes the atmosphere of Greece and Crete during the German attack with a fidelity I have not seen elsewhere equalled; and to those who were there it will no doubt come as a refreshment after the scrappy sensational prose works of the professional journalists. Certainly as a record of an epoch-making campaign it must outlive, by its very humility and simplicity and probity, more pretentious books.

LAWRENCE DURRELL

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Introduction

The following brief account of what I saw during the Campaign of Crete was written immediately after my evacuation to Egypt. It was composed hurriedly, as I wished to set down the events while they were still fresh in my mind. For obvious reasons I had destroyed all notes in my possession and I was obliged to rely solely on my memory aided by some mnemonic signs I had scrawled in the margins of a pocket calendar.

It should be noted that this account does not aim at providing information of a purely *military* nature, as this angle has been far more competently dealt with in various official publications. My object is rather to describe the mental, moral, and psychological reactions of ordinary individuals—including myself—when suddenly confronted by a wholly unexpected emergency.

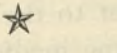
On re-reading the MS, its shortcomings were only too apparent, but I decided that it would convey a truer and more vivid picture of that grim period if left as originally written rather than if revised—and perhaps distorted—by too much pruning and correcting. No changes have therefore been made except for a few interpolations, generally to clarify the text.

I would like to add that some of my criticisms may be unmerited since, when expressing them, I was not in possession of all the facts and could only see one side of any particular question. I retain the original version however (with apologies where they may be due), as my censures reflect the opinions and prejudices held by nearly everybody during that chaotic month.

Details such as these throw into clearer relief the mental and moral repercussions of a major military disaster on the minor participants in it. They help to reconstruct the confused world of the 'little man' who, with only a dim and incomplete vision of his surroundings, suddenly finds himself overwhelmed by one of the cloudbursts of History.

I

The Evacuation from Greece



When the retreat from the north of Greece began, the 66th A.M.P.C. Group (O.C. Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. Courage), to which I was attached as regimental medical officer, returned in a hurry from Volo to Daphni. Motor-lorries brought us to Daphni Camp, about twelve kilometres north-west of Athens, on the afternoon of the 19th of April 1941. This camp, an agglomeration of tents of various shapes and sizes, was situated amongst lovely pine woods not far from the celebrated Byzantine chapel of the same name.

The next day I was able to get a few hours' leave to go down to Athens. Everything appeared quiet and normal, except that air-raid alarms were sounding most of the time, during which all shops shut and all traffic stopped On the whole, everybody seemed cheerful and optimistic, and confident that the Germans would be held on the Lamia-Thermopylae line.

The suicide on April the 18th of Mr. Korizis, the Prime Minister, was known to everybody. The papers had reported it as 'heart-failure', but it was an open secret that he had shot himself.

The shopkeepers and all whom I came in contact with

were particularly bitter against the Minister for War, who, they said, had betrayed Greece and 'ought to be hanged in Constitution Square with all his accomplices'. Everybody agreed that 'now everything will be all right as a more resolute Government will take charge'.

I saw a friend of mine, Lieutenant George Katsimbalis, who was of the opinion that the situation was very grave, but that the Lamia line could be defended. As he held a post in the Greek G.H.Q., I considered his verdict very reassuring.

On the 21st I went to the 26th General Hospital at Kiphissia to draw some medical supplies as most of my equipment had been left behind in Volo. On passing through Athens I noticed no marked signs of uneasiness, the shops and cafés were open as usual.

There was an air-raid alarm at about 10 a.m. while I was at Kiphissia and I saw a dozen German planes which seemed to be bombing the Tatoi aerodrome. There was some ack-ack fire and I saw two planes dive very steeply without reappearing above the trees which limited my view. It was impossible to say however if they had been brought down or if they were only dive-bombing. After one of these dives there was a terrific explosion and a great black column of smoke which mushroomed out at a height of several thousand feet. It was certainly something more than a bomb-burst, but I could not tell if it was the enemy plane which had crashed or a small petrol dump which had been blown up.

I handed in my indent at the hospital dispensary, housed in the Olympus, one of the luxury hotels of peacetime Kiphissia, and was told to call again the next morning for my stores.

That same afternoon we moved from Daphni Camp and were billeted in a pleasant little villa in Old Phaleron.

Its one drawback was that it was situated just opposite the seaplane base, and I thought that it might become rather a hot spot if the enemy were to bomb the hangars.

Lieutenant-Colonel Courage invited Captain James, Captain Rose, and me to dine with him that evening at Costi's restaurant. We had a very pleasant meal and everything seemed normal. The place was full of people, including British and Greek officers, and everybody appeared cheerful and confident. On our way to Costi's, we had dropped in for a drink at the Officers' Club just opposite the Grande Bretagne Hotel. All the officers we saw there were optimistic and they told us that the Germans were being thrown back with terrific losses all along the Lamia line. The news about the Greek army in Albania was not quite so good, but everybody seemed certain that it would be able to fall back all right and join hands with the rest of the forces.

We left Costi's at about 11 p.m. and suddenly discovered that there was not a taxi to be seen anywhere to take us down to Phaleron. We had to walk the whole way and it was only when we had almost reached our billet that a private car passed us and an old gentleman with a white beard stopped and offered us a lift. We all bundled in out of politeness and almost immediately bundled out again opposite our front door. The old gentleman would take no refusal.

The next morning, the 22nd of April, we had breakfast as usual. None of us had the slightest inkling that an evacuation was contemplated. We even thought that we would go up the line again to Gravia in a few days' time.

I was given a small 15-cwt. truck to take delivery of the medical supplies from the 26th General Hospital. As Lieutenant Katsimbalis had invited me to lunch, I asked if the truck could drop me at Constitution Square on the

way back and leave me to return to Phaleron by taxi at three o'clock. Permission was readily granted; I was only told to leave Lieutenant Katsimbalis's telephone number so as to be informed of any transfer to another billet situated less unpleasantly close to the seaplane base.

The hospital at Kiphissia was unchanged. I saw medical officers and sisters walking about without any signs of flurry or excitement, and I never guessed that many of them knew that evacuation orders had been already issued. To my surprise, I was given all the medical stores I had asked for without any haggling; this fact should have been enough to inform me that something unusual was in the wind had I been of a less unsuspecting nature. After collecting my parcels and bottles, I drove off and got out at Constitution Square as had been arranged.

Athens still looked the same as ever, except that there were fewer people in the streets and I sensed a strange atmosphere of tension which I could not quite explain. I put this down however to the continual air-raid alarms, but, although ack-ack rang out from time to time, I did not see any Axis planes or hear any bombs. The public appeared calm enough, and the shops and cafés were doing a brisk business except when they were closed during an actual alert. I did notice that there seemed to be more British cars and transport vehicles in the streets than usual, but the difference was not marked enough to make me think that anything exceptional was happening.

Lieutenant Katsimbalis was more perturbed than he had been two days before, as he had heard news that the Lamia line was cracking, but he did not seem unduly worried, as he hoped that it was only an alarmist rumour. We had just finished lunch when the telephone rang in the next room; Mrs. Katsimbalis answered it and called out to me that somebody was telling me to 'return at

once'. I went to the instrument, but the line had gone dead, and, as our billet did not have a telephone, it was impossible to know where the call had come from. I guessed though that something unusual must have happened and hurried off at once. It never occurred to me however that there was an evacuation on; I merely thought that we had received orders to move up to the front again.

Once more all the taxis seemed to have suddenly disappeared and all the army vehicles I saw were going in the wrong direction. At last, after walking a good third of the way, I managed to get a lift to Phaleron. But, when I arrived at our billet, I had the very disconcerting surprise of finding the place empty and everybody gone, including my batman and all my kit. I literally had nothing except what I stood up in. Fortunately I had my steel helmet and a first-aid outfit which I always carried about with me.

I felt very worried, as I thought that the others had suddenly been ordered up the line and would be wondering what had become of me. But how was I to find out where they had gone? I decided that my best plan was to make inquiries at the Area H.Q. in Syngrou Avenue. When I got there I noticed a good deal of bustle and activity, and saw that sentries with tommy-guns had been posted at each entrance. I was not able to learn the whereabouts of my unit (perhaps there were orders not to give away too much information), but I was instructed to join one of the companies of the Cyprus Regiment at Kokinia. By a piece of good luck I ran into Lieutenant Gordon of the Cyprus Regiment, who told me that he was just leaving for Kokinia in his truck and offered me a lift. It was from him that I learnt for the first time that a wholesale evacuation was actually under way. I was quite surprised as, somehow or other, the idea had never occurred to me.

I thought that we would be able to hold the Lamia line indefinitely or, if the worst came to the worst, I believed we would defend the Peloponnesus at the Corinth Canal.

When we arrived at Kokinia, I found a tremendous difference from when I had last seen it in March. Instead of the quiet and orderly camp routine, lorries were being hurriedly packed, stores and equipment were flung about anyhow, officers' valises and suitcases were lying open with their contents scattered around as if the owners had made a hasty choice of their more valuable belongings at the last moment.

Crowds of disconsolate civilians were wandering about the camp, including many women who appeared more than half distraught. Some of them asked me: 'Are you really leaving us? Will those German and Italian pigs march into our Athens?' I had to parry their questions by saying that I did not know—which was more or less the truth. A number of the women also inquired if they could remove some of the blankets and rations which lay strewn around as 'it is better that we and our children should get them than the German swine'. I said that, once the camp was evacuated, they could act as they thought fit. I certainly hoped that they would take the stuff as I hated the idea of all those supplies falling into enemy hands. And, from what I saw as I left, I think that very little did.

Within half an hour of my arrival most of the lorries had already been driven away and the men were being marched off by sections. I learnt that Captain T. W. Longridge, who had been my C.O. in Libya, had left just before. The last lorry belonging to his company was about to depart, so I boarded it together with Lieutenant A. P. Mikelides, R.A.M.C. We drove out of Kokinia Camp at

about 3 p.m.; on our way we picked up Major Reid, also of the Cyprus Regiment.

We drove straight down to Piraeus and through the town. The streets were thronged with people and, as British army vehicles were arriving all the time, they must have known by now that we were pulling out. Yet we never saw a black look; all the spectators waved to us and called: *'Narthité mé to kalo! Na yiristé mé tin nikin!'* ('Come back with good fortune! Return with victory!') An old woman even threw a small bunch of carnations into the back of our lorry.

I got rather a shock when I saw the port which I remembered so well from previous journeys. Many of the houses along the quays lay in blackened ruins and the harbour was filled with battered and burnt-out shipping. All the harbour installations too had been very badly damaged by bombing and by the explosion of a munition ship during the first German air-raid on April the 6th.

We went to a small dock north-west of the main harbour in which two small steamers were waiting to take off troops. It was now about 4 p.m. I saw Major Murray, Major Pitcairn, Captain Searle and several other officers whom I knew. Major Murray had already received orders to embark his men (the 606th Palestinian Pioneer Company) and they were filing up the gangway with their rifles and light equipment. They kept perfect order, although every now and then the air-raid sirens shrieked and ack-ack fire and more or less distant bombing could be heard. After the Palestinians, Major Reid's Cypriot Pioneer Company also went on board together with Lieutenant Mikelides; rations and water in petrol-tins were shipped as well. Major Murray wanted me to join his party, but I pointed out that, as he already had a medical

officer with him, it would be better if I followed in the next ship. He agreed.

About this time there was another air-raid alarm and several German aircraft came over. I felt sure that they were about to attack us, but they went instead for a steamer a couple of miles outside the harbour. This vessel must have been carrying petrol or munitions, as she blew up with a tall column of black smoke.

Towards 5 p.m. a number of taxis and private cars began to arrive. They were bringing the personnel of the British Legation and some of the staff of the Greek Press Bureau, who might be treated rather roughly by the Germans if they remained behind. I saw Mr. Seferiades of the Press Bureau whom I knew, also the British Minister, Sir Michael Palairet, Colonel Blunt, the Military Attaché, and Mr. Sargint, a sculptor I had once met in Corfu. A little later two lorries full of German prisoners arrived under strong escort. These were all airmen and other specialists that it would have been inadvisable to leave behind. They were rather a scrubby lot on the whole, submen rather than supermen, but they all wore a look of exultant arrogance. I would have liked to wipe the grin off some of their faces with half a brick. Many more cars followed bringing further droves of civilians, probably from the Dutch, Belgian, Yugoslav, and other Allied legations. Soon the whole place was cluttered up with cars and I wondered if this would attract the enemy planes. Fortunately it did not.

All these people boarded the second steamer, the S.S. *Elsie*, and shortly after dark the two vessels pushed off. Then an old Greek collier, the S.S. *Julia*, was brought alongside the quay and it was our turn to start embarking. As with the others, we first shipped a plentiful supply of rations and petrol-tins full of water.

By this time it was quite dark and there was no moon. The great difficulty was to get the men to refrain from smoking. It is not so much the glow from the actual cigarette which is the danger, but the flare each time a match is struck. This is easily seen for miles and can attract the attention of any enemy aircraft that may be prowling around. I have never been able to understand the mentality of those smokers who apparently *must* light a cigarette even if it puts their own and other people's lives in danger. It was only when Captain Longridge threatened to leave anybody caught smoking behind that the nuisance was somewhat abated. Finally everybody and everything was aboard by about 11 p.m. This included Major Pitcairn, Captain Longridge, Captain Fenn, Second-Lieutenant Kyriakides, and two or three other officers of the Cyprus Regiment, and myself. There were also some 250 men from the 1,005th, 200 from the 1,006th, and another thirty or forty from other Pioneer Companies of the Cyprus Regiment. (Figures very approximate.)

When we had all embarked, we had to wait for an Australian Pioneer Company which arrived some time after midnight. Finally they too came on board, about five officers and 120 men, and we left port between 1 and 2 a.m. of April the 23rd.

The steamer was not carrying any cargo, so most of the men were sent down into the 'tween-decks, the holds, and the forecastle, where they would be protected from machine-gun fire if we were attacked by enemy planes. Some of the officers who had managed to save their bedding dispersed themselves in sheltered parts of the deck. I had only a blanket which I had picked up at Kokinia and, with several other officers equally destitute, I established myself in the ship's tiny saloon. We had some civilian refugees on board, Mr. Hill, his wife and three

children, the youngest being a baby in arms. The ship's captain had very kindly given them his own cabin. We were not at all overcrowded as the *Julia*, which I judged to be about 1,500 tons burden or more, could easily have carried twice our number, and I was rather surprised that more troops were not evacuated by her.

I slept quite soundly and awoke at about 6 a.m. and went out on deck. It was a lovely morning with a very calm sea and a clear sky. I saw that we had not come very far down the coast; this was disappointing as we were still in the danger zone from enemy bombers. Our ship could only do a maximum of seven knots, so we were not much more than thirty miles from Piraeus.

Just then I heard a shout followed by much rushing about and confusion and, looking north-east, I saw seven aircraft approaching us at no great height. They were grouped in two V's of three planes each with a solitary plane a little distance ahead, and, though they were still too far away to be recognized as friends or enemies, it was highly probable that they were the latter.

The night before all the officers, including the Australians, had discussed what should be done in the event of an air attack. There were no ack-ack guns on board, nor did we have any machine-guns or Brens. Also, as we were all pioneer units, even rifles were scarce; some thirty rifles were all that could be mustered with about two hundred rounds per rifle. These were distributed to the most reliable men, mostly N.C.O.'s (U.K., Australian, and Cypriot), with instructions to aim just ahead and below the plane as it dived and slightly above it when it zoomed away.

At the first alarm these men were ready and it was soon evident that we would need them as the planes made straight for us and we saw that they were the dreaded Stuka (Junkers 87B) dive-bombers. It was grimly fascina-

ting to watch them as they roared up. They formed themselves in a line and as each plane arrived nearly overhead it flipped over on its side and then on its nose and seemed to fall vertically down on us. The Stukas made a most terrific screaming sound as they dived and, what with the banging of our thirty rifles, the din was deafening. When each plane had swooped down to about one thousand feet, one saw a black speck detach itself from the undercarriage and plummet downwards with a fiendish whistling.

A few seconds after the first plane had swept by, there was a loud explosion and a huge column of white foam rose just behind our stern and toppled over onto the deck. Two men, I think they were members of the crew, were crouching near the stern rail and they leapt or were flung overboard by the blast. That must certainly have been the end of both. I had no time to think of anything, however, as in quick succession the other six planes also launched their bombs. Splashes rose all round the *Julia*, and each time the whole vessel reeled and there was a shock and a curious metallic clang caused, I suppose, by the compression wave hitting the side. I thought each time that the ship herself had been hit and was quite surprised that we were not sinking. Fortunately the bombing stopped when the eighth bomb had splashed into the sea near us. When attacking shipping, the Stuka generally carries only one large or, as was the case with one of our assailants, two smaller bombs.

Then, just as I thought that the planes were going to leave us in peace, they suddenly turned and dived at us once again, this time with their machine-guns blazing. I saw everybody scuttling for cover and fortunately the saloon door was near enough for me to dive in head-first. Several bullets came in also, one of them wounding an Australian sergeant, who had dived in with me, in the left

wrist, smashing his wrist-watch and carrying pieces of it into the wound. The *Julia* had iron decks and the bullets made a tremendous clatter, like a violent hailstorm on a galvanized-iron roof, as they skipped and ricocheted all over the place. Fortunately the whole attack could not have lasted more than a few minutes—although it seemed much longer—after which the planes cleared off.

Some of the spectators insisted that several of the planes had come down to mast height before zooming out of their dive and that they had even swerved to avoid hitting the masts. The first plane certainly did not come anywhere near as low as that and I do not think that any of the others did either—although they came a damn sight lower than I liked. But I was rather confused with the noise and the suddenness of everything, and I do not wish to be dogmatic on this point. Other onlookers also affirmed that they distinctly saw some of the planes swerve away from our rifle fire and that this was one of the factors which caused all the bombs to miss us. This is not impossible as I have heard it said that aircraft dislike random rifle fire. There was great jubilation too because one of the planes had made off trailing a thin plume of smoke Personally I thought that it was only the exhaust, but naturally I did not try to throw cold water on the smoke theory as it had a good effect on the men's morale.

During this attack the *Julia* had been plodding along at her usual crawl. I was afraid that the first bomb had blown off the propeller, but apparently it did insignificant damage, as the ship's speed was only reduced by one knot.

Immediately the attack was over, I started to look after the injured. I expected that there would be plenty of killed and wounded, but I was pleasantly surprised to find that there were no killed and only thirteen wounded —none seriously. In fact the two worst cases were the ser-

geant with the bullet through the wrist and an Australian private whose left calf had been ploughed by a bullet which had run along below the skin for about four inches before coming out again. An Australian corporal, who had acted as medical orderly for his company, was of great assistance to me in tending the casualties. Fortunately he too had some bandages and medical supplies which, added to my own, gave us all we needed. The ship's saloon was transformed into a sick-bay.

I was still working when, at about 10 a.m., nine dive-bombers made a fresh attack on us. The patients and I, together with several other officers and men who happened to be in the saloon, lay down on the floor, shoving as much of our persons as we could beneath the table, the settee, and the chairs, and hoped for the best. We heard the shrill scream of the diving planes and the nine bombs falling around us, also the metallic thump against the ship's side which made us think each time that we were hit. Fortunately all the bombs missed, though by very little. This time there were no killed or injured except for one man, a Cypriot, who got blown over the edge of an open hatch and fell thirty or forty feet into the hold. I expected to find him dead, but when I climbed down to him on a giddy little iron ladder I found that he had only a sprained wrist and some minor cuts and bruises. He had landed on a big heap of straw and escaped by some miracle. We had a good deal of difficulty in hoisting him out of the hold as he could not climb by himself, but we managed it at last with a rope.

The patient seemed more indignant than frightened by his misadventure and, as he was being drawn bumpily upwards, I heard him muttering angrily to himself—'To hell with those bloody Germans, couldn't they have built a dance-hall for themselves instead of taking Poland's and

starting this bloody war!' I was considerably mystified at first by this new and startling theory on the causes of the War, but finally all was made clear. Just a little confusion between 'Danzig' and 'dancing'—the Greek word for dance-hall. This certainly argued an original outlook on History; but, on second thoughts, was it so ludicrous after all? Could anything be madder than the actual truth? I scarcely think so.

I used part of the forecastle as a ward, also the first mate's cabin next-door to the saloon, and soon got all the patients fairly comfortable. After the second air attack, the captain of the *Julia* decided that it would be best to anchor as close as possible to the cliffs of the nearby island of Ydra. This would conceal us from planes coming from the west and south, and make us less conspicuous to planes arriving from other directions as, on that glassy sea, our tell-tale wake could be seen from the air for miles. It would also make it more difficult for the Stukas to bomb us, as they would have to be careful not to crash into the cliff when coming out of their dive.

On casting anchor, there was a conference between the ship's officers and the army officers as to whether it would be advisable to put the troops and the crew ashore until nightfall. It was decided finally not to do so for fear that they would scatter all over the island. This would make it difficult, if not impossible, to round them up again. And if too many of the crew were missing, especially the engine-room gang, the *Julia* would be immobilized for good. The men were kept instead under cover, mostly in the holds and the 'tween-decks, so that the ship would not seem to be carrying troops and also to protect them from machine-gun fire. I half-expected the men to refuse to go below under the circumstances, but they went like lambs with very little fuss.

At 2 p.m. there was a third attack by about five Stukas, each one of which dropped a bomb. All missed fortunately, but one at least was so close that seaweed and mud from the bottom was cast up on the deck. I noticed afterwards a lot of dead fish floating on the surface and some of the crew were scooping them up in improvised nets.

The captain told me that we would leave soon after sunset, and I never knew a day to last so long, even though I had plenty to occupy my attention. Nobody had been hurt in the third attack except one of the crew who had been blown against a stanchion and had sustained some cuts and bruises. I found that the Australian who had been wounded in the leg had had numerous fragments of trousers and sock carried into the wound. As I did not know how long it would be before I could get him to a hospital, I was afraid that infection might set in. So I decided to slit open the whole length of the tunnel made by the bullet and thus wash and clean out the wound thoroughly. I gave the patient an injection of a quarter of a grain of morphia and told him to suck a quarter-grain morphia tablet and did the job without causing him overmuch pain.

At about 5 p.m. there was a fourth attack by about five Stukas, but once again every bomb missed. We had several alarms after that as more than once aircraft appeared in the distance; but either they were ours or they did not spot us. Finally, at long last, the sun went down without another attack.

Just as we were preparing to leave, a rowing-boat put off from the shore and hailed us. It was the deputy harbourmaster, who wanted to know who we were and where we were going. We told him to go to the devil in very unparliamentary language as we feared that he might be a Fifth Columnist. Then we slipped quietly away into the

dark. The *Julia's* plates had been strained by the explosions and she soon began to leak. Fortunately the leaks were not serious, and were easily kept under by the ship's pumps.

Towards 3 a.m., April the 24th, there was another air-raid alarm and we heard a number of planes pass low overhead, but we could not tell if they were friends or foes. Anyway we were not attacked.

Before it was full daylight, the captain anchored in a little cove off the island of Cythera so as not to have to travel during the day. This day passed even slower than the previous one; twice we saw aircraft in the distance and a large flying-boat at about 5 p.m., but none came near us and we never knew if they were ours or the enemy's. About midday a cheer went up as the rumour was spread that a British cruiser and a couple of destroyers were on their way to convoy us. But, although we saw some smoke on the horizon, nothing appeared in sight. Some time during the afternoon we happened to pick up a German station on the ship's radio set, and were rather amused to hear the announcer say in English that a troop-ship had been bombed and sunk the previous day off Ydra. Apparently the Stukas thought that they had put paid to our account. After sunset we again crept out of our retreat and made for Crete and Suda Bay.

Daybreak, April the 25th, showed us the Cretan coast-line with the snow-covered Aspra Vouna (White Mountains) in the distance. At about 7 a.m. there was another alarm when a plane suddenly circled over us. But what cheers burst from everyone when we saw the red, white and blue circles under the wings instead of the hateful black crosses!

An hour later we arrived at Suda Bay and a mine-sweeper came out to pilot us through the minefields.

There was a great double boom across the entrance of the bay which was opened to let us pass.

I had often heard of Suda Bay, but I never imagined that it would be a land-locked expanse of water about eight miles long capable of sheltering a whole fleet. It was surrounded by olive-clad hills rising gradually to more arid uplands and culminating in the snowy 8,000-feet crests of the Aspra Vouna, home of the *agrimi* and the *moufflon* (species of wild goat and wild sheep).

There was a small island near the entrance of the bay surmounted by an old Venetian castle; a steamer, which had been bombed a few days before, lay half-submerged some distance from the shore.

The first thing we saw when we got right inside the bay was the six-inch-gun cruiser H.M.S. *York*. She was beached and down by the stern with her after-turret awash, as she had been torpedoed a few weeks before by an Italian motor torpedo-boat which had crept into the harbour when the boom was not properly closed. It is some consolation at least to know that the motor-boat did *not* get away.

There were several merchantmen inside the bay, including a smallish tramp with several objects which looked like huge packing-cases on her decks. We were told that she had seventeen Hurricanes on board, and that she had been waiting ten days without being able to unload them as there was only one available wharf. No other had been built during the six months that the British military authorities had been on the island. We could not believe *then* that there was such an apparent lack of organization. We were also pointed out a curious-looking contraption by the water's edge, and learnt that it was an 'aerial mine-thrower'. It could apparently hurl a net of piano-wire fitted with contact bombs to a height of several thousand

feet and entangle and destroy an enemy plane. However, this particular mine-thrower could not be used as there was no ammunition for it. This when an air-borne attack was—or should have been—expected!

We also saw two small float-planes and two immense Sunderland flying-boats, one of which took off shortly after our arrival. It was certainly impressive to watch that huge machine sweep down the bay and glide from the water into the air with scarcely a ripple of foam.

Half an hour or so after our arrival, a large flat-bottomed self-propelling invasion-barge disembarked the Australians, and twenty minutes later a tiny steamer collected us also. We must have looked a sight, as most of us were begrimed with the coal-dust with which the collier was liberally coated.

Before our departure I was ~~delighted~~ delegated to make a little speech of thanks to the captain and crew of the *Julia*. They had all behaved extremely well, especially the captain, who did not leave his bridge even during the bombing.

An amusing little tale I learnt from one of the sailors on board the *Julia* concerned the origin of the expression '*Malta yok*', which is sometimes used in the Balkans to indicate a particularly difficult task. It seems that at the time of Queen Victoria's Jubilee a naval review was held in Valetta Harbour, Malta, to which warships of all nations were invited. Turkey should have been represented by a cruiser, but her captain wandered around for several weeks searching for the tiny island and not finding it. At last he gave up the attempt in disgust and, returning to his anchorage in the Golden Horn, sent in the laconic report '*Malta yok*'—'Malta doesn't exist'. Many a yachtsman who has tried to reach Malta by dead reckoning will sympathize with the apocryphal Ottoman seaman.

II

The First Weeks in Crete

★

We landed on the quay at Suda, a village of bomb-shattered single-story houses along a dilapidated water-front. Two tramps full of tins of aviation spirit were unloading alongside the only jetty and I had rather a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach as I wondered what would happen if we had an air-raid just at that moment. We received orders to go to Camp E, 'only a quarter of an hour's walk beyond Suda', to rest and recuperate for a few days. We also learnt the glad news that tea and refreshments would be awaiting us just outside the village.

Suda had been evacuated by most of its inhabitants as it was very frequently bombed. We saw many wrecked houses and, from the size of the craters, it looked as if 500lb. bombs or larger had been used. After trudging a good mile, we were cheered by the sight of several trestle tables in an olive grove by the side of the road. Here we had a short rest and were given a cup of tea, a slab of chocolate, and a packet of biscuits each. There was an air-raid alarm whilst we were eating and we all dived madly into the nearest ditches or cowered under the olive trees. A few slit-trenches in the vicinity were packed three or four deep. It was only a 'shufti plane' (reconnaissance),

however, and it dropped no bombs, for which we were devoutly thankful.

We now learnt that Camp E was still three or four miles further on! The prospect was not alluring as we were all burdened with the few belongings we had saved, besides being more or less exhausted. I was carrying a haversack which still contained some medical supplies, a blanket, and a ground-sheet, and they seemed to be getting heavier with every step. It was a hot day too, and we were all in thick battle-dress.

We first followed the main road towards Canea and then branched to the left down a tree-planted highway known as Tobruk Avenue. A light Decauville railway ran parallel with the road and there were several very conspicuous storehouses on one side of Tobruk Avenue and a petrol dump on the other. The latter did not seem to be guarded at all and I wondered how it had never been blown up by Fifth Columnists. All the dumps in the Suda area must have been very obvious to aerial observation with the railway lines wandering through them and I could not understand why the Germans had not bombed them so far.

There was a square-walled monastery at the end of Tobruk Avenue and here we turned right and followed a dusty country road which wound through olive groves and orchards of orange and lemon surrounded by cactus hedges. We passed a large wireless station on our left and went through several small villages. On our way we frequently met straggling groups of Australians and New Zealanders going in the same direction as ourselves. They too looked grimy and dishevelled, but their morale seemed unshaken and I noticed that many of them were carrying tommy-guns or Brens. We also met a boy on a tricycle selling ices at two drachmae each and 'stopped

him and bought one'; in fact we soon cleaned out his whole stock. The ices had a vague flavour of mould and vanilla, but they were very refreshing all the same.

After having marched three miles or more since leaving Suda, we saw a camp in the distance which we hoped would be ours, but when we reached it we learnt that Camp E was still a good two miles further on. We passed through another village, called, I believe, Perivolia, with a stone fountain let into an old wall. From this we drank deeply and gratefully before continuing our march which brought us into a hilly region watered by tiny mountain streams. Finally, towards mid-afternoon, we tracked down Camp E, a small wooded valley in the Kaloros foothills, and collapsed panting in the shade of some gnarled olive trees. All the olive groves around us were also occupied, mostly by Australians and New Zealanders of the 6th Australian Division and the 4th and 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigades.

Soon after our arrival a lorry (proudly displaying the painted name 'Annie Lorry'—this pun never seemed to lose its appeal) drove up and dumped some tins of bully beef, biscuits, and plum jam for us, together with a sand-bag of tea and another of sugar. With these rations and a few empty petrol tins we soon prepared a satisfying meal which we washed down with lashings of scalding tea. The amount of food was quite sufficient for a small eater like myself, but I think that most of the others could have done with a little bit more.

I slept very heavily that night, in spite of the fact that I felt rather cold lying on the ground-sheet with only one blanket over me.

The next morning, April the 26th, we were transferred to another site about half a mile away across a small valley, at the bottom of which flowed an ice-cold moun-

tain torrent. There was a little village at the head of this valley, and the hollow itself was filled with orange and olive groves. We were told we had four days to rest and recover, and we made ourselves as comfortable as we could under the trees. Fortunately we were given several bales of blankets, two for everybody, and rations were plentiful. Besides the usual bully beef and biscuits, these included tinned bacon, tinned sausage, tinned fruit, tea, sugar, milk, margarine, and several kinds of jam. Incidentally it is a curious fact that the brands of tinned bacon issued during the first years of the War hardly resembled bacon at all. The contents of the tin when cooked just dissolved into a greasy, tasteless mess. I feel sure that the Army authorities must have employed highly trained (and salaried) bacon-detasters to achieve such a result. The peasants from the nearby village also supplied us with eggs and oranges, often refusing to take payment for them.

It was a great relief to throw off one's clothes and plunge into the cold, refreshing stream and wash away all the dirt and coal-dust collected on board the *Julia*. I had only a pocket-handkerchief to dry myself with, but fortunately the sun was quite warm by ten o'clock. I also washed my underclothes (the rations included soap) and dried them in the sun, after which I felt more human again. Afterwards the whole camp lay about in the sun and just soaked rest in through the pores. Many of the men of the 1,005th Company had had a really bad time, as they had retreated the best part of the way from Larissa on foot under bombs and machine-gun fire.

During the day several enemy planes, probably on reconnaissance, appeared in the distance and were fired on by our ack-ack, but they were too far away to cause us any uneasiness.

In the afternoon I held a medical inspection of the men, but they were still too keyed up and too thankful to be ashore to think of illnesses. There were only a few minor ailments and some unimportant cuts and bruises sustained by those who had been thrown about on board the *Julia*.

The great problem was sanitation, as I could only obtain one pick and two shovels to dig trench-latrines for nearly five hundred men. Obviously it was not possible to dig enough, especially as none of the fatigue parties were in a condition to do much work. To complicate matters, we were surrounded on all sides by other troops, mostly Australians and New Zealanders, who often wandered into our preserves and committed nuisances. (No doubt our men repaid them in kind.) But, considering all the circumstances, our camp was not too dirty—or, at any rate, not as dirty as it might have been.

The next three days were uneventful and restful. Now and then we saw German aircraft in the distance and heard fairly heavy bombing from the direction of Suda, and guessed that the enemy was having a crack at our shipping. The men kept in good health except for a few colds and chills. There were four cases of bad diarrhoea or mild dysentery, caused, I suspected, from eating too much fruit, which had to be evacuated to the 7th General Hospital not far from Canea. On the second day of our stay we were joined by Captain Germenakos with about forty men of one of the other Pioneer Companies of the Cyprus Regiment. They had managed to escape from Eleusis and had been brought over to Crete with some Australian troops.

On the last day of April we received orders to proceed to Monastery Camp at the south end of Tobruk Avenue, about four kilometres south-east of Canea, and we started

the long and dusty trek back again, carrying our few possessions. We were all rather sorry to leave the peaceful valley where we had spent four very pleasant days, more especially as we knew, from the bombing we had heard, that we were returning to less salubrious climes.

Monastery Camp, as its name implies, was situated in an olive grove just outside the surrounding wall of an old Greek Orthodox monastery. It consisted of a number of E.P.I.P. tents (European personnel, Indian pattern), double-ridge tents, bell-tents, and a corrugated-iron shed or two for cookhouses and so forth. There was once again the usual deficient sanitation, one deep-pit latrine—and not deep enough at that—for the whole camp. I must say that this rather surprised me in what was supposed to be a more or less permanent camp, and I had considerable trouble during the subsequent days in remedying this state of affairs as far as I was able.

We had parted from the 1,006th Company and Captain Germenakos's detachment, which had been sent that morning to dig in the tents of the 7th General Hospital a few miles west of Canea. This left only Captain Longridge, Captain Fenn, Second-Lieutenant Connor, Second-Lieutenant Rossiter and myself. We slept in one of the E.P.I.P. tents and that night I observed rather a curious incident. Waking up at about 3 a.m., I noticed that the others were snoring more or less loudly; then there came the drone of a plane—probably one of ours—passing overhead and, although none of the sleepers woke, their snoring instantly stopped as if they were listening subconsciously. The nasal symphony began again with renewed vigour as soon as the noise of the plane died away in the distance.

The next morning, May the 1st, I walked the couple of miles to Canea to report to Lieutenant-Colonel S. O.

Dolan, the A.D.M.S. (Assistant Director of Medical Services), and see what I could obtain in the way of medical supplies. The A.D.M.S.'s office was on the outskirts of Canea in the more modern quarter of the town. There were many pleasant little houses, each surrounded by a garden, and the streets were wide and planted with trees, mostly sweet-scented Persian lilac (*Melia azedarach*) in full bloom. This part of the town did not seem to have been bombed much, although I noticed a few demolished houses here and there and others with every window-pane smashed and their walls scarred and pitted by bomb-splinters. One of the latter must have been owned by a champion optimist, as there was a large 'Desirable residence to be let' placard in English and Greek hanging on one of the battered shutters. I was not able to get much in the medical line as there was rather a shortage at the time, but I was given some aspirin, acriflavine, bismuth and soda tablets and a few shell-dressings, which was always something. There was no time to have a look at the rest of the town that day as I had to return to camp.

On May the 7th I arranged to have the whole morning free to go to Canea, as there were many things I wanted to buy, including a change of underclothes, as I still had only the clothes in which I had left Piraeus. The central and older parts of the town were a maze of crooked, narrow, cobbled streets with very tall houses whose blank white façades were pierced with tiers of dingy green-shuttered windows. The shops were mostly primitive and small, many of them mere booths with a few shelves of jumbled merchandise. Cafés were numerous, each one with its stained wooden tables and its squat rush-bottomed chairs erupting all over the pavement.

Most of the inhabitants had remained in the town and

nearly all the shops were open and doing business. The cafés were full of people sipping their little cups of black Turkish coffee and reading their papers as usual. Many of the men were dressed in the Cretan national costume—round, black astrakhan caps or a black cloth wound turban-like around the head, wide-sleeved white shirts, baggy blue breeches, and natural leather or white top-boots. They were mostly slim and dark, of medium height and very tough and wiry-looking. Many of the older men wore beards. I was rather curious to find out if the modern Cretans still had the wasp-like waists depicted in ancient Minoan art, but their middles were so girt about with broad blue cummerbunds or enormous leather belts that I was left wondering. Nor would it have been any easier, without an X-ray apparatus, to judge by those who were wearing the shapeless sacks which passed as 'European' clothes. It did seem to me, however, that many of the younger men had unusually slim waists, and I have since been told that this is the conclusion also of some anthropologists. The costume of the women was not very different from that of the men except that they wore dark blue pleated skirts, and dark scarves on their heads. Many of them were distinctly pretty, and they were more delicately built and with finer features than on the Greek mainland, where stocky types are common.

There were numbers of soldiers about the place, mostly Australians and New Zealanders, but also some from the United Kingdom. The majority of them looked rather dishevelled, and occasionally one met some who were more or less drunk and who were bawling sentimental—and other—ditties at the tops of their voices. Apparently proper discipline had not yet been quite restored.

I obtained the things I wanted, including a pair of forceps and some Michel's clips. The chemist's shops were

very good for a town of that size. I also went to the Officers' Shop to buy a few articles of equipment. It was situated very picturesquely in an old Venetian arsenal down by the port. Canea harbour had not been as badly damaged as Suda, and a number of *caiques*, those hardy little sailing-vessels of the Levant, reflected their bright colours and trim lines in the still waters. These craft are built in most of the Aegean and Ionian Islands and each place has its own distinctive lines and colour schemes. I recognized a *caique* from Cephalonia by its broad, concave bows and remembered a curious old legend of the Grecian seas once told to me by a Cephalonian skipper. This was his tale:

'Sometimes, on a calm moonlit night, a beautiful *lamia* [sea spirit] rises out of the sea and grasps the gunwale of a *caique*. She is the otherworld mother of Alexander the Great, and she ever seeks news of her beloved son with the words "How goes it with Alexander?" Woe to the shipmaster who replies that Alexander has been dead and gone for many a hundred years. In her disappointed rage, the *lamia* will tear the side out of the vessel and sink her with all aboard. But if the shipmaster is wise enough to answer "He lives and reigns", the delighted *lamia* will reward him with a calm sea and a prosperous voyage. Many a seaman who has sailed these waters could vouch for the truth of my story—as could my own brother if he were here. But, alas! he no doubt gave the wrong answer, for his *caique* set out from Cephalonia these forty years ago and he and his crew have never been seen again.'

On my way back to camp, I stopped at a little confectioner's shop and had two glasses of lemonade and a couple of ices, as it was quite a hot day. They only had some rather tasteless vanilla ices, but I found them nice and refreshing all the same. There was an air-raid alarm while

I was still in town. I noticed that the people were very calm about it and paid very little attention to the sirens. Either they were a tough lot or they had not yet experienced a real bombing. The alert only lasted for about half an hour, however, and we only heard some distant gunfire from the direction of Suda.

I bought one of the local daily papers, and saw that it was on the whole very optimistic. The editorial stressed that Crete could and would defend itself and that this last piece of free Greek soil must be held to the very last. It also mentioned that Major-General Bernard C. Freyberg, V.C., C.-in-C. of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of all the Allied Forces in Crete on May the 5th.

During my walk I passed several ditches still full of water. They contained swarms of tadpoles and mosquito larvae; these were all *Culicidae*, however, no *Anophelinae* appeared to be present.

About May the 8th we were ordered to leave Monastery Camp, which was to be used as a transit camp, and park ourselves in an olive grove half a mile further south. There was a large farm near this place which looked as if it had formerly been a monastery, as it was enclosed by high, stone walls. The proprietor was a Cretan who had lived for many years in America, and who spoke good English, but with a strong American accent. He was very helpful and allowed us to draw water from his well, and did all he could in other ways to be useful to us.

We were only allowed to take three tents with us to our new site, two double-ridge and one E.P.I.P. We used the latter as an officers' mess, one of the double-ridge tents for the Company office and the other for quartermaster stores. So once again we all had to sleep under the trees; happily the weather remained fine, but it was still rather

cold at night. I was able to find a couple of boards to sleep on; they were rather hard, but they kept the chill of the ground off. I tried using olive branches and grass as a mattress, but with indifferent success. The former dug their sharp ends into one and the latter was full of tiny harvest-mites of some sort which caused a good deal of skin irritation.

Incidentally, we spent many pleasant evenings in the E.P.I.P. mess tent as, by a happy chance, we all had a certain *penchant* for literature and we often amused ourselves with paper games until far into the night. Our favourite by far was 'Best Sellers'. We would decide beforehand on the names of the hero, the heroine, the villain and the villainess; then the first player would write six lines of a story, fold the paper so that only the last line was visible, and pass it on to the next in turn. The latter would do likewise, continuing the tale according to what he thought he could infer from the uncovered last line. This would continue until we reached the happy or tragic ending, when the hybrid concoction would be read out amidst loud cheers and laughter. Sometimes the results were too surrealist to be intelligible, but often they would be excrutiatingly funny—or so we thought. I can still more or less remember some of the astonishing anti-climaxes which invariably doubled us up. Here are a couple of them; the words in italics represent the line left visible by one of the players.

'. . . "Help! Save me!" shrieked Diana Carstairs despairingly, as Sir Jasper Cadleigh seized her by the throat and hurled her violently to the floor. "I am coming, darling!" cried an eager young voice as the door was burst from its hinges *and Jack Hartley strode into the drawing-room with a* tennis-racket in his hand. "Splendid!" said he, leaping gaily through the french window, "I see that

the doubles have already begun. What a delightful spectacle!" And with a bright laugh Jack Hartley disappeared round the rose bushes.'

Another one ran:

'A whole armoured division rushed the undefended gap in the mountains, the huge panzers roaring along like dragons breathing smoke and flame and preceded by the screaming crescendo of the dive-bombers. In one stupendous mass, this phalanx of destruction *poured down the hillside with a sound of distant thunder.* Martin Tremayne drew Jane Maltravers closer to his breast. "Look, sweetheart", he whispered, "how the glittering rainbows gem each onrushing wave—the very sunbeams reflect and symbolize our love." And thus, hand in hand, oblivious to the world, they reached the tiny chalet in its setting of slumbrous pines.'

There was another farm to the south-west of us, much smaller than the one previously mentioned, where the people also kindly put their well at our disposal. I had my work cut out seeing that the men did not dip dirty buckets into this and the other well and thus contaminate the water. The sanitation of the camp also gave me a good deal of trouble; eventually, however, judging from the other camps around us, ours became one of the cleanest. Among other measures, I set up old petrol tins for waste-paper and other refuse and had a fatigue party to clean up the camp several times a day. I rigged them up sticks with a nail at the end (like those of London park-keepers) to pick up empty cigarette-cartons and such like scraps, and they thought it great fun (?). I also constructed a rough but effective incinerator from a metal tar-drum.

The shortage of medical supplies was still acute and I had to call on my knowledge of botany to make up my

own medicines from various available plants. I used lesser centaury, mallow, plaintain, mulberry, pine bark, etc., with very satisfactory results; auto-suggestion on the part of the recipients probably helped with the good work. Mallow, in the form of infusions, was very useful, as there was an epidemic of colds and chills, fortunately mild, owing to everybody sleeping in the open.

Soon after our arrival, some sort of jollification—a wedding, I think it was—took place at a cottage not far from our camp, and this gave me the opportunity of seeing the Cretan national dance, the *Pentozali*, in its natural setting. It was a very picturesque spectacle, the Cretan peasants in their striking costumes dancing under the grey olive trees. Perhaps for some of those present it was their last dance this side of the grave, but no one could then foresee the peril that lurked in the skies, and death seemed remote on that calm springtime afternoon.

The tune of the *Pentozali*, as with most Greek folk-songs and dances, is modal; it has, however, a characteristic rhythm peculiar to Crete. The dancers stand in a long line with their hands on each other's shoulders, and move from left to right with a high swinging step, the line curving until it forms a more or less complete circle. The tempo grows more and more lively as the dance proceeds until none but the most agile can stand the pace.

It is considered a great honour to be the first at the right end of the line, as the dancer holding this position 'draws' the dance and regulates its rhythm. He is expected to insert as many fancy steps of his own invention as he likes and his performance is sometimes quite acrobatic. When the leader is tired, his place is taken by the next-best dancer, and so on until all who so wish have had an opportunity to show off their skill.

The women generally make up a separate circle of their

own. This was formerly a strict rule, but customs are not quite so rigid nowadays, and men and women were dancing together at this particular festival. I noticed though that most of the men had drifted to the front end of the line while the women brought up the rear.

That much for the *Pentozali*, which only an accomplished musician and an expert dancing-master could hope to describe adequately. I found the experience a memorable one, and the shrill notes of a brace of fiddle-like three-stringed Cretan *lyrae* (played by musicians who held their instruments across their knees and their bows somewhere about the middle) blended with the throb of a barrel-shaped drum to make the war seem misty and remote.

In some parts of Crete and also in continental Greece, especially the north, a simplified version of the bagpipes called a *gaida* is among the peasant instruments played. This was known in classical times in Thrace and is said to be the ancestor of the Scottish bagpipes, having been brought to the British Isles by a Thracian legion which did garrison duty on the Roman Wall.

Several British soldiers were amongst the guests and had been roped into the dance; they were going through the steps somewhat awkwardly and self-consciously, but with evident satisfaction to all concerned. I was careful to remain well concealed in the thicket from which I was watching the scene, as I knew that otherwise I too would be pounced upon with true Cretan hospitality, and it might be hours before I could take leave of my hosts without giving them offence.

Incidentally, Crete is famous for its folk-songs as well as for its dances, and among these the *distich* has always been very popular. It consists of a single rhyming couplet in which the whole idea must be succinctly expressed. One

of them, which struck me as being particularly representative of the island's atmosphere of force and vitality, ran as follows:

The youth who never has aspired to ride the clouds unfurled,
Of what use is his life to him, of what use is the world!

The whole of Crete is expressed in those two lines.

Of course it is not only in Crete that the distich is cultivated, as this form of versification is popular all over Greece and apparently particularly so in Cyprus. When censoring the letters of the men of the Cyprus Regiment (one of my little 'overtime chores'), I noticed that these were often plentifully besprinkled with distichs, some original, others taken from traditional sources. Many of these latter are remarkable for the beauty of their word-pictures and their almost epigrammatic terseness and brilliance. A few examples will show what I mean:

O woods and thickets make a path and forest trees retire,
Or, kindled by my hopeless sighs, your boughs shall be my pyre!

Yon tiny cottage is accursed and shamed in every stone,
For there a lovely maiden sleeps—and she doth sleep alone.

I weep in secret, for the world now points at me with scorn;
I have been wounded once again—and by the selfsame thorn.

When thou dost blush, O maiden sweet, the dawn breaks o'er the skies,
And, wakened by that rosy glow, the joyous larks arise.

I sent an apple to my love, I bit it to the core,
And in the bite I hid a kiss—would it were twenty more!

My love is smiling in her sleep, sweet dreams my love doth see,
And I am jealous of those dreams, for doth she dream of me?

About May the 10th, Major Murray and his unit turned up, together with Major Reid, Lieutenant Gordon and Lieutenant Mikelides. They had about two hundred men of the 606th Palestinian Pioneer Company of the 66th A.M.P.C. Group and about one hundred and fifty men of one of the Cyprus Pioneer Companies. They had all gone through a terrible time as their ship had been attacked by Stukas on the same day as ours and had to put into Melos harbour, where she was again bombed and sunk. They remained a week on the island under continuous attack by enemy aircraft till they were taken off by a British destroyer after sustaining a number of casualties in killed and wounded. Major Reid and his party encamped among the olive trees in our vicinity, and were joined a few days later by Captain Germenakos and his men. Major Murray and the Palestinians moved to an olive grove nearer Suda on the east side of '42nd Street'. This, in spite of its impressive title, was just a rough sunken road winding through fields and olive groves.

A few days later, Captain James and Captain Rose, two officers who had been with me in Volo, also turned up with three men of the Cyprus Regiment. They had escaped with a few Cretan soldiers in a fishing-boat from one of the villages near Gytheion in South Peloponnesus, and had reached Crete after being at sea for three stormy

days. I was sorry to hear from them that Lieutenant-Colonel Courage was missing, and was believed to have been drowned in a small boat which got bombed. Most of the officers and men of my former unit, including my batman, Petros Vasileiou, had been captured or were missing. It was indeed lucky for me that I had gone to Kiphissia for my medical supplies on the morning of the evacuation or I might have shared the same fate. I learnt too with regret that Major Winders and Captain Watson of the old Mersa Matruh days had both been taken prisoners. Another officer, who was an excellent swimmer, escaped by swimming out to sea, where he was picked up by a British destroyer.

Among the few things that Captain Longridge had managed to save was a small wireless set belonging to the 1,005th Pioneer Company. Lieutenant Rossiter had taken the accumulator to Canea to be recharged, and we were able at last to hear the wireless news. This was a very great treat, as up till now we had only heard rumours or the stale news printed in the Cretan local papers. One day we picked up Hitler's speech on the Greek Campaign, translated into English, from one of the German stations. What a liar that man was! The losses he gave for the Luftwaffe for the whole campaign were actually less than the planes which had been brought down in the Volo-Larissa area alone. And it was evident that his tank and infantry losses had been watered down with equal thoroughness. We were amused too to hear Lord Haw-Haw's repeated assertions that we would be driven out of Crete which he called 'The Island of Doomed Men'. It never even remotely occurred to us that this could really happen, as we thought that, during the six months the military authorities had been in the island, all the necessary measures had been taken to make Crete impregnable

to any kind of assault. Unfortunately it turned out that Haw-Haw was right and we were wrong.

We were also able to hear some good music, though we generally had to tune into a German post to get it. It is a curious thing that the B.B.C. apparently imagined that the troops only wanted to listen to everlasting jazz programmes and nothing else. How often do I remember the expression, both in Crete and in the Western Desert: 'Oh, let's switch onto a German post and get some *real* music.' On the comparatively few occasions when the B.B.C. dragged itself away from its jazz and gave something a bit different, the news quickly spread through the camp, and a crowd would collect round the radio set with its ears flapping in the breeze. And what delight if some of the old favourite tunes happened to be played! —'In the Gloaming'; 'I'll walk beside you'; 'The Banks of Loch Lomond'; 'Silver Threads among the Gold'; 'The Old Folks at Home'; 'There is a Tavern in the Town'— the men never seemed to grow tired of these songs. You could tell it by the enthusiasm with which they joined in the singing and by their disappointed groans when the squawking jazz butted in again, all too soon.

This war seems to have produced far fewer memorable songs than the last one. I can only think of three: the Australian 'Waltzing Matilda', the South African 'Sarie Marais', and the German 'Lili Marlen'. The latter was taken over by the 8th Army with all the rest of the booty from Rommel's Afrika Korps, and was for a long time very popular with the troops. I made the following translation myself, and (in my opinion at least) it is far better than any of the others I have heard, as it is closer to the original and can be fitted more snugly to the tune.

LILI MARLEN

In the barrack courtyard,
By the iron gate,
Hangs the swinging lantern
Where you used to wait.
There shall we greet each other, sweet,
Beneath that lantern we shall meet
As once, Lili Marlen,
As once, Lili Marlen.

Our two shadows, sweetheart,
Mingle and enlace
As I hold you tightly
In my fond embrace.
And all the world may see it, sweet,
When 'neath that lantern we shall meet
As once, Lili Marlen,
As once, Lili Marlen.

Often has that lantern
Heard your footsteps light;
Long it has not seen me
Though it shines all night.
And if ill luck should greet me, sweet,
Who will you 'neath that lantern meet
As once, Lili Marlen,
As once, Lili Marlen.

In the stilly evening,
In the day's last gleam,
I can see you smiling
Lovely as a dream.

Some day 'mid twilight shadows, sweet,
Beneath that lantern we shall meet
As once, Lili Marlen,
As once, Lili Marlen.

During the last few days the enemy planes had been increasingly active both by day and by night. From our camp we could see them dive-bombing the shipping in Suda Bay and our men, whose principal job was unloading the supply-ships, had a very tough time of it. Several were wounded, but none had been killed so far, although they all had narrow escapes. The men would leave each morning for their work with rather grim and anxious expressions, and I certainly could not blame them. I could not imagine anything more unpleasant than to be dive-bombed while unloading a cargo of high explosive or petrol with no cover anywhere near.

According to general opinion, the warning system at Suda was very indifferently organized, and what I saw seemed to bear this out. There were apparently no plane-spotters, and other precautionary measures appeared to be equally deficient. In fact the first warning of an air-raid that the dock workers generally received was the opening salvoes of the ack-ack guns. The senior officer in charge of the unloading had some high-falutin' notions about the duty of working parties to consider themselves front-line soldiers, and to carry on until they were actually bombed. This was quite right in theory, but it showed that he had absolutely no idea of psychology. A man may stick to his post in the excitement of battle or he may stand up to dive-bombing if he has a weapon in his hands and feels that he can hit back. But no man can face dive-bombing for very long when engaged in the prosaic task of unloading coils of barbed wire or crates of bully beef;

and he is still less enthusiastic if he is handling boxes of high explosive or tins of aviation spirit and he knows that there is a shipful of the same stuff beneath his feet. The net result of this policy was that the men, knowing that they were not going to receive early warning of a raid were jumpy the *whole* time and the work suffered in consequence; while if a rational system of warning had been organized in conjunction with the provision of adequate air-raid shelters, much more work would have been done in the long run. I believe that Captain Longridge and other officers pointed this out to the requisite authorities, but they insisted on doing things in their own way. Probably they had heard about the Boy who Stood on the Burning Deck or the Charge of the Light Brigade.

The German planes' favourite time was a little before sunset. They would suddenly appear out of the blue and bomb Suda or the coast just east of Canea where I was told that H.Q. had their dugouts. All the ack-ack in the neighbourhood would open up on the enemy, but, though there were several batteries of Bofors and some heavier stuff, there were not nearly enough guns to be very effective. Some Hurricane fighters were still based on the island and these would pounce on the Stukas as they were straightening out of their dive or intercept them over the sea as they were making off. We saw quite a number of Axis aircraft fluttering down out of control or plunging earthwards in flames. Sometimes a plane would dash away seawards leaving a long trail of black smoke behind it. As the moon waxed, the Germans took to coming at night also, and we were frequently woken up by the sound of bombs and gunfire. Often we would see a plane caught like a great white moth in the intersecting beams of several searchlights and held for an appreciable time. Then the guns would start firing, but I never saw

them score a hit. The sparkle of the bursting shells appeared generally far behind the speeding plane as it shook itself free from the clutching fingers of light.

It was about this time that the enemy started a very heavy bombing of the Maleme aerodrome, situated on the north-west coast about ten miles west of Canea. They attacked it both by day and by night, but mostly in the morning, and the bombing would sometimes continue for an hour or more without a break. We were told that the Germans were only wasting their bombs on some dummy planes scattered around the landing-field, and we hoped that this reassuring information was true, though most of us had our secret doubts.

So far we had been receiving very good rations, except that everything was tinned, apart from the bread. These included several kinds of jam and tinned fruit such as apricot, peach, gooseberry and even pineapple; I was very fond of the last. Of course we also had the everlasting bully beef and Maconochie's baked beans or meat and vegetables (M & V). Incidentally, to the Cypriots 'bully beef' was synonymous with 'tinned'. I remember once asking the mess cook what there was for supper and getting the answer: 'Bully beef fish-cakes and bully beef pineapple with bully beef milk' (i.e. tinned salmon fish-cakes and tinned pineapple with tinned milk).

A very nice padre was our guest to dinner one night. He was a classical scholar of exceptional learning, and he recited for my benefit a stupendous number of verses from Homer and other ancient Greek poets. It was a wonderful performance, but I wondered once again why people should be taught to pronounce ancient Greek as if it were modern English. One can answer of course that as the ancient Greeks did not leave us any gramophone records of their voices, we really don't know how

they did speak. But, even then, I think that the only *logical* course would be to pronounce ancient Greek with modern Greek as a basis, just as I would take modern English as my model if I were trying to learn the language of the time of Chaucer, rather than give the words a Russian or a Chinese pronunciation. I have sometimes heard people trying to speak modern Greek in the same manner and being quite surprised that the hall-porter or taxi-driver could not understand them. There is a story that a certain political personage on a diplomatic mission to Greece once made a long speech in Greek at some important social function. He was subsequently congratulated by a dear old bishop who said to him, 'How I wished that I understood English so as to be able to follow your inspired words!' The poet Skelton must have known this sort of thing in his own time, as in 'Speake Parrot' he mocks at Greek scholars in the following terms:

But our Grekis their Greke so wel haue applied
That they cannot say in Greke, riding by the way,
How hosteler, fetche my horse a bottel of hay.

Several new units encamped around us, including the 1,005th Dock Operating Company and a company of Royal Marines. Neither of them had a medical officer, so I used to go round to them every morning for sick parade. The 1,005th Dock Operating Company contained a large proportion of shipping clerks from London, Liverpool, and Manchester, who had joined this company with the idea that they would only do clerical work. Instead of this, the Military Authorities, perhaps misled by the unit's ambiguous name, put them on to unloading ships, a work for which most of them were not physically fitted, as there was only a small leavening of real stevedores among them.

This company had received a very rough handling in Greece and their ship was bombed and sunk on the way to Crete. The survivors were rescued by another vessel which was also bombed, but managed to escape. Consequently when the men learnt that their job would be to unload ships in Suda Bay, and be bombed again, there was a good deal of consternation—for which I really cannot blame them. The result was that, out of a total of about 220 men, there were 96 on sick parade. This placed me in a very difficult position as their officers were almost foaming at the mouth, and clamouring for me to put the majority of them down as malingerers so that they could be severely dealt with. Most of these men, however, were in such a state of nervous prostration from what they had been through that it would have been sheer cruelty to adopt such extreme measures. But by giving those who had the worst jitters a few days' light duty in camp and by talking to the others and putting them on their honour I was able very soon to reduce the number of sick to between fifteen and twenty.

The Marines were a very different crowd. First of all they had come out from England via Egypt quite recently and had not yet been shot up by the enemy, and secondly they were all regular soldiers, most of them with many years' service. They all looked very spick and span, and most of the things I treated them for were only minor accidents, except for one man who had his foot badly crushed by the wheel of a lorry. They had brought several heavy ack-ack guns with them, one of which they mounted in position among the olive trees of Monastery Camp. They also had a number of enormous motor-vehicles known as Matadors to draw the guns and carry the gun-crews with all their equipment. I could not help wondering if these monsters would prove very practical

on the bad and narrow Cretan roads, and if an equivalent cargo space of tanks, Bren-carriers, or light trucks would not have been more useful to the defence in the long run.

Every day the German bombing grew more intense at Maleme and Suda. Often we would see dense clouds of smoke rising from Suda Bay and we knew that the enemy had got one of our supply-ships. One afternoon a succession of loud explosions with dense masses of black and white smoke billowing up from behind Suda told us that a petrol dump had been hit. The enemy planes developed a trick of slipping along behind the circle of hills which surrounded Suda Bay and then suddenly swooping down on it through a gap towards the south-east. In this way they could often launch their bombs and get well away before the ack-ack had time to get really going.

The Germans also started strafing the camps. Our camp got shot up several times with machine-gun and cannon fire; it was curious to compare the sharp rattle of the machine-guns with the slower and more clanging report of the planes' light cannon. Fortunately we had good slit-trenches into which we would dive with great abandon. Four or five men sustained slight injuries; one had a very narrow escape when a machine-gun bullet slashed across his chest, cutting open the flesh to the breast-bone.

On May the 14th I found a four-leaved clover, the first one I had seen since 1907. I pressed it for luck in a little notebook my daughter had made me and kept it there with my snapshots from home. I also found a four-leaved yellow wood-sorrel (*Oxalis*), this was the only four-leaved specimen I had ever observed.

Towards 4 p.m., on or about May the 15th, we had a scare which sent us scurrying to the slit-trenches. The ack-ack guns around us began firing furiously and we suddenly saw seven biplanes, all flying unusually low.

When these planes were almost overhead and we were preparing for the worst, we noticed with surprise that they had blue, white, and blue circles under the wings. They were *Greek* planes! The ack-ack ceased fire as soon as they realized this fact and the aircraft continued their flight, unharmed, towards Herakleion. We heard subsequently that these were Greek planes which were being sent to Egypt because they were too antiquated to stand a chance in air combat. Another version was that they were aircraft which had recently escaped from the Germans in Greece. I never learnt which, if either, of these two rumours was correct. This was the last time we saw a friendly plane in Crete, as the British planes were also recalled to Egypt, leaving Crete without any air defence whatsoever except for a totally inadequate number of ack-ack guns.

Meanwhile enemy bombing became heavier and heavier, especially on Suda Bay, the H.Q. dugouts near Canea and the Maleme aerodrome. The latter seemed to be bombed at any time, but principally towards 8 a.m.

I again visited Canea on May the 16th. A lorry gave me a lift from Tobruk Avenue, and it was only when we were well on our way that I noticed that the wooden box I was sitting on contained dynamite and that there were about thirty more similar cases on board. Two men were lounging among these cases and one of them must have noticed my expression of distaste, because he said: 'Don't worry, sir; if the dynamite doesn't go up you're all right, and if it *does* you'd never know it.' This somewhat specious reasoning did not reassure me very much, however, and I was glad when the lorry turned up a side street and thus gave me an excuse to get down without loss of 'face'.

Canea seemed more or less the same as on my previous visit, except that there were less people on the streets and

a few more shops were shut. The difference, though, was was not marked and I was still able to buy a couple of ices and a local newspaper. The tone of the latter was as confident as ever, and the inhabitants I saw about the place did not seem perturbed or apprehensive.

From now onwards the Germans redoubled their efforts. Bombing took place more or less all day, and was directed principally against Maleme and, to a lesser extent, against Suda. All the camps, including our own, were given a whiff of machine-gun and cannon every now and then, so that with one thing and another we were becoming adepts at plunging into slit-trenches with the minimum delay. It was about this time that we first noticed that there were no more air battles, and that the Germans were only met with ack-ack fire—such as there was of it. But we did not yet realize that all British aircraft had been ordered away from Crete.

On the 18th I received a note from the A.D.M.S. to the effect that the 7th General Hospital now had some medical supplies at last, and that I could go there and draw a 'medical-companion' (alias 'monkey-box'), a canvas-covered wicker basket containing instruments, drugs, and other first-aid necessities. This was good news, as I was short of everything in the medical line.

The 7th General Hospital was situated on the coastal road beyond the village of Kato Galatas; it was five or six miles west of Canea and not far from the Maleme aerodrome. It was about the same distance, as the crow flies, from our camp, but fortunately the C.O. of the 1,005th Dock Operating Company had a small truck at his disposal which he lent me for a few hours the next morning.

I set out accordingly at 10 a.m. on May the 19th, after my usual medical rounds. We passed through the outskirts of Canea, which seemed unchanged, meeting Cap-

tain Searle and Lieutenant Kyriakides to whom we gave a lift, as their camp was not far from the hospital. We followed a fairly level road with olive groves on either side, went through Kato Galatas and several New Zealand camps, and finally reached an open piece of ground sloping gradually down to the sea. This site was crowded with tents of all shapes and sizes in orderly rows, as well as a certain number of wooden shacks, the whole covering a wide area and constituting the 7th General Hospital. I was rather surprised that it had not yet been bombed in spite of the conspicuous red cross displayed on the ground. I drew my 'medical-companion', and afterwards visited some of the patients I had sent to the hospital; among these was Lance-Corporal Smith, the medical orderly of the 1,005th Dock Operating Company, who had been of great assistance to me until he fell sick.

I left about midday. The place looked so peaceful that it was difficult afterwards to imagine that the very next morning German parachutists descended right into the hospital area, and that a certain number of the patients and nursing staff were killed in the fighting. On my way back I saw many Maori soldiers in some of the New Zealand camps. They were mostly well-built athletic men with rather coarse but not negroid features, and with frank and pleasant expressions for the most part. Their colour varied; the fairest was not much more pigmented than a southern European and the darkest scarcely differed from a sunburnt Arab. Their uniforms were the same as the other New Zealanders and, like them, they wore Boy-Scout-pattern hats.

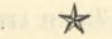
There was a remarkably fine sunset that evening; the sun appeared to be sinking into a sea of blood against which the black branches of olive trees were strikingly silhouetted. Had I foreseen what was so soon to come, I

might have read an omen in this grim outlining of the symbol of peace against that crimson ocean which seemed to be flooding the whole world. But the angry glow gradually faded and the calm stars appeared one by one—symbols too of a peace as distant and as unattainable as the heavens themselves.

The weather had, on the whole, kept unusually fine since our arrival in Crete. There was a bit of wind now and then and a few showers, but they did not last long; a lucky occurrence for us as we were all sleeping out in the open. We had not yet been troubled by flies or mosquitoes.

III

The Battle for Crete



May the 20th dawned bright and fine. At about 7.30 a.m. some of the other officers and I were standing near the mess tent, chatting and waiting for breakfast to be served, when suddenly without any warning there was a terrific outburst of ack-ack fire. We all sprang into the slit-trenches, thinking that this was just another of the ordinary raids we had got so used to lately. But this time it was something very different. Before we knew what was happening, the skies were full of German planes which had apparently sprung from nowhere. There seemed to be hundreds of them diving, zooming, and criss-crossing as they bombed and machine-gunned all over the place. Then a flight of large silvery machines passed low down over our heads, coming from the south-west and making for Canea. They passed as silently as ghosts with just a swishing sound instead of the usual roar, and their wings were very long and tapering. It was only then that I understood that these were *gliders* and that an airborne attack on Crete had begun in grim earnest.

Shells from our ack-ack guns were bursting all around the gliders and their accompanying planes, but these were so many and our guns so pitifully few that little damage

seemed to be caused. I saw one glider twist sideways with a jerk and come down behind the trees at a very steep slant, and I guessed that it must have crashed, but most of the others—about thirty, I estimated—slid serenely on and descended in the direction of Canea. They were going much slower than an ordinary plane and I reflected what a hash a few of our Hurricanes would have made of them if only they had been there.

I was just gazing at a bomber which appeared to have been hit, as it was swaying from side to side with a long plume of black smoke trailing behind it, when there was a shout from Captain Fenn: 'Look! Parachutists!'

I spun round and saw a row of tiny black dots falling from some of the planes which were buzzing around. They seemed to have been loosed from a very low altitude, and they blossomed out almost instantly into little white umbrellas which disappeared behind the trees. Some of the parachutes appeared to be coloured green or brown, but they were too far away (luckily!) for me to be certain. Some again were much larger than the others and had a curious elongated shape; it was only later that I learnt that these were triple parachutes carrying light mortars, munitions, and other heavy stuff. The planes weaved about continuously in all directions and dropped wave after wave of these parachutes in a long arc extending from roughly south-west to north of us. Fortunately they all seemed fairly distant, but parachutists are too near in my opinion wherever they may be. It was difficult too to judge distances and to know exactly where they had come down owing to the densely crowded trees which surrounded us.

Incidentally, it was not until I had actually seen them that I realized the enormous size of a parachute. I had pictured parachutes to be four or five times as large as an

umbrella, but in reality they looked twenty or thirty times that size, quite dwarfing the tiny figures of the men who dangled beneath them. When the distance is great enough, only the parachute itself is visible.

In the meanwhile a terrific outburst of Bren, rifle, and tommy-gun fire was added to the other noises and, what with the ack-ack, the bursting bombs, the shriek of diving planes and the rattle of their machine-guns and light cannon, the uproar reached an almost unbelievable intensity. It did not add to our peace of mind, either, to reflect that none of us knew what was really happening, that we had never received instructions what to do in a similar emergency, that nearly all our men were unarmed, and that none of us had the faintest idea as to how near the Germans really were to us. It was impossible to see very far through the trees, but the small-arms fire was very close to the west of us.

Captain Longridge and Captain Fenn had the rifles (about twenty) and ammunition served out to the most reliable N.C.O.'s and men, and these took cover along a bank facing in the direction where the small-arms fire seemed to be nearest. The rest of the men were ordered to keep out of sight in the slit-trenches and under the trees. I looked to my first-aid kit and saw to it that my shell-dressings and bandages were handy. Captain Longridge sent Lieutenant Connor and Lieutenant Rossiter to contact Major Reid and Captain Germenakos, so as to take defence measures in common. The idea entertained at first of using the farm building as a strongpoint was not practicable as the surrounding walls had not been loopholed. Defenders behind them could not have fired upon attackers, who would have been able to advance unmolested to the foot of the wall and lob hand-grenades over it. It was decided that we stood a better

chance scattered in the open under cover of the olive trees and in the ditches and slit-trenches.

Just at that moment a runner from the Marines hurried up with a message ordering Captain Longridge to send his second-in-command with any men who were armed to join the troops (I forget which units) who were going to hold a makeshift line against the advancing Germans. Captain Longridge himself was to fall back towards Suda with all those who were weaponless and await further instructions. The runner added that we had better hurry as the enemy was advancing this way, and unarmed men would be in a tough spot, besides being a nuisance to the defence. We subsequently learnt that the parachutists who had landed in this particular area were wiped out a few hours later, after a brisk engagement in which our men played a useful part, although they had never been trained for infantry fighting. But some of them seemed to take to guerrilla tactics instinctively like a duck to the water.

In accordance with his instructions, Captain Longridge rallied the men, and we drew off under cover of the trees in the wake of a detachment of Marines who were retiring to hold a line further back in case the first should be rushed, and to mop up the isolated groups of parachutists who had been scattered in our rear. Our way took us past an ammunition-dump, and we had supplementary orders to carry a certain number of boxes of small-arms ammunition to a minor dump near Suda. During this time the bombing had slackened a bit and the rifle and machine-gun fire did not seem to have come any closer, but none of us knew what was the real situation. Before leaving the camp I rescued my precious 'medical-companion', a haversack of shell-dressings and bandages and my water-bottle. I would have liked to take a blanket and a ground-

sheet also, but the 'medical-companion' and haversack were so heavy that I doubted if I could carry anything more. Before rejoining the others, however, I stuffed a comb, a tooth-brush, a cake of soap, a towel, and a spare pair of socks into the pockets and blouse of my battle-dress. For the next hour or so I was able to make myself useful by translating Captain Longridge's orders to the Cypriots, who showed, on the whole, commendable coolness in the face of this unexpected situation.

We retired through great dumps of ammunition-boxes and petrol tins, stacked under the olive trees and very thinly camouflaged, in my opinion, with branches and tarpaulin. The light-railway lines, too, which wandered about the area seemed to me a glaring 'give-away' of these dumps to air observation. We took over the ammunition-boxes as ordered and went on towards Suda. There was a marked lull in the bombing our way, although it was still going strong in the direction of Canea. Now and then we had to take cover from passing aircraft which roared low down overhead, firing machine-guns and light cannon, but we did not have any casualties.

We reached the outskirts of Suda at about 11 a.m., delivered the ammunition to some waiting transport, and received orders to rejoin Major Murray at his camp situated in an olive grove near 42nd Street. When we arrived at the camp site, we found that the Palestinians had already left it and retired a little further inland, as they had been badly machine-gunned from the air. Captain Longridge was instructed to take his men into an orchard of orange trees about half a mile to the south and remain there until further orders; this he did. The orange trees were small but bushy with a few large olive trees scattered among them, and there were thick olive groves all around; all these afforded excellent cover against aerial

observation. The orchard must have belonged to a person with some knowledge of agriculture as the trees were well pruned and looked after, and the ground under them had been newly ploughed. The men were distributed around under the trees with strict orders not to move about or show themselves.

Towards 2.30 p.m. the lull was broken, and the bombing and machine-gunning started again as noisily as ever. A number of planes attacked the nearby Canea—Suda high road and another lot bombed and machine-gunned all the olive groves around. Our particular area came in for a good deal of very unwelcome attention as the Germans evidently suspected that there were troops in the neighbourhood, although I do not think that they had actually spotted us. For hours planes were continually circling above, sometimes so low that we could catch an occasional glimpse of the airmen in the glass-enclosed cockpits. Machine-gun bullets were whistling and swishing into the ground or thudding against the trees all around us. Even when a plane was going away from one it was not safe because the rear gunner would then be firing. The planes were also using light cannon, which made a continuous sharp banging sound, besides heavy and anti-personnel bombs. The latter were small bombs which burst on impact and splintered into a great number of small, razor-sharp fragments.

There seemed to be several different types of aircraft flying about, but I was never much good at recognizing planes—except perhaps the Stuka with its only too unforgettable outlines. It was enough for me to see the swastika and those hateful black crosses to inhibit all desire for more intimate acquaintance! Now and then I saw yellow planes with what looked like Italian fasces painted on their wings, but there were very few of these.

A perfectly infuriating feature of the whole affair was the leisurely manner of the enemy; one could see that he knew he was on to a soft thing and was gloatingly enjoying himself. He did not just drop his bombs and streak for home like the Italians did in Libya. No, he remained and went on circling above one. Some of the aircraft made such a loud noise that I wondered if they were provided with those rattles I had read about. Probably this was not so, but even an ordinary plane can more than half deafen you if it insists on skimming the tree-tops. There was one plane, that I could recognize from a smudge near the cross on its starboard wing, which must have remained overhead for more than an hour, buzzing backwards and forwards and round and round and round until I was heartily sick of it.

All this time I was lying on my face trying to make myself as flat as possible, and digging my way into the ploughed earth with my hands and the toes of my boots until I had literally scooped myself quite a hollow. While thus engaged, I heard a dull plonk and felt my left arm grow wet. For a moment I thought that I had been hit, and then found that a bullet had gone through my water-bottle which was lying a foot or two from me. This was extremely annoying, as water becomes a very valuable commodity at such times.

At about 4.30 p.m. there was a sudden lull, and we saw to our delight that all the planes were moving away northwards. But in a few minutes a deep droning filled the whole sky, and before we could realize what was happening, a fresh lot of planes appeared on the scene, and the whole business began all over again until we felt absolutely dazed. Finally, at long last, night fell and only then did the enemy let up and give us a rest. I made the rounds to see if anyone had been injured, but, in spite of

all that clatter and clamour and uproar, only two men had been slightly wounded—mere scratches—and nobody killed.

As a matter of fact I was never much impressed by the Luftwaffe as far as *quality* was concerned. *Quantity* yes, but if the R.A.F. had had all the material the Germans had and the same immunity from air attack they enjoyed in Crete—and to a certain extent in Greece—our airmen would have obtained far more substantial results. Considering the scarcity of roads in Greece and their state of universal disrepair, nobody should ever have got out of that country if the Luftwaffe had been the really hot stuff it was cracked up to be. And in our particular case we were 200 men or more herded together in little more than an acre of ground and bombed, shelled, and machine-gunned for about six hours almost without a break, and yet our only casualties were two men slightly hurt and one water-bottle put out of action. Yet the German planes could cruise around with complete impunity, as we had not even a rifle to defend ourselves with, and the all-too-few ack-ack guns in the neighbourhood could not protect us as they had their hands full shooting at the planes which were trying (and sometimes succeeding through sheer weight of numbers and bombs) to knock them out.

After nightfall we had a blessed respite. Most of us had had nothing to eat from the previous night, but I do not think that I could have eaten much even if you had put the finest dinner from the Carlton in front of me: All I wanted was to sleep, and I actually did fall asleep without being aware of it. I was woken up at about 3 a.m. by the bitter cold. I was lying on the bare ground without any blanket either under or over me and, although it was May, the nights were still raw and chilly in spite of the heat of the day. I could not restore my circulation by

walking about, for fear of treading on and disturbing other people in the dark, so I sat hunched up with my arms around my knees trying to keep my teeth from chattering. It was a most unpleasant night; one moment I would long for the morning only to remember that the enemy planes would be back again with the daylight and then I would wonder which of the two evils was slightly the less. I wondered too what was happening, and what would happen on the morrow, and whether I would catch pneumonia in the meanwhile. No, from all points of view, it was decidedly not an enjoyable night.

At last morning dawned, and punctually towards 6.30 a.m. there was that same all-pervading drone in the distance getting louder and louder until it filled the whole sky and the same old merry-go-round began all over again. I knew that the Germans must be landing more parachutists, but, owing to the surrounding trees, we could only see the planes which were circling directly above us, though we heard very heavy bombing both from the direction of Canea and of Suda Bay.

At about 8.30 Captain Longridge received orders to take his men to another olive grove a couple of miles further inland as our orange grove was getting decidedly too hot. I was told at the same time to report to Major Murray at his H.Q. in a little peasant cottage on the east side of 42nd Street.

There was a slight lull about 9 a.m., and Captain Longridge quickly gathered his men in small parties and hurried them across the more or less open piece of ground which separated us from the thickly wooded country beyond. They were nearly all across when several German planes swooped down. It was then that I saw rather a curious psychological phenomenon. I had often heard of people running around in circles when confused or

frightened, but I thought that it was only a figurative expression. It was now shown however to be absolutely literal. When the aircraft appeared, one of the men, instead of taking cover or remaining quite still, began to run round and round in circles—or rather in ellipses with a long axis of about ten yards. I had to pull him behind a bush by force as I was afraid that he would attract the planes' attention and involve us all in the mess. Luckily after a short time the enemy left us alone. Net result: one man with a bullet graze in the shoulder which only needed a little gauze, acriflavine, and sticking-plaster.

After the last man had disappeared in the denser olive groves, I went and found Major Murray and had a breakfast of tinned sausages, toast, jam, and tea. I cannot say that I felt very hungry even now, but I knew that I ought to eat something to keep up my strength.

I had just finished breakfast, when one of the Palestinians came hurrying up to ask me to go and see a comrade of his who had just been wounded by a bomb-splinter a couple of hundred yards from us. I followed him to a small peasant cottage on 42nd Street into which the wounded man had been carried. This cottage had been hastily abandoned by its owners, probably the day before, and it was rather pathetic to see what were no doubt their most cherished possessions, things for which they had perhaps pinched and scraped for years, strewn about in wild disorder. I noticed that the pillow-cases and sheets of the bed on which the wounded man had been laid were carefully and neatly embroidered round the hems. The man had been injured by a bomb-fragment which had penetrated the abdomen just above the right hip. I could see that he was in a bad way, but there was no means of ascertaining if the splinter had pierced the bladder or the

intestines. I could only bandage him, give him a morphia injection, and hope for the best. I also sent for a stretcher and four stretcher-bearers to carry the patient to the C.C.S. (Casualty Clearing Station) at Suda, where he would receive the best treatment possible under the circumstances. While looking for soap and a towel to wash my hands, I pulled open a chest of drawers and saw that it was full of Sunday clothes, including a pair of high-heeled green suède shoes carefully wrapped in tissue paper. This little touch somehow seemed to me more typical of the miseries caused by war than even the wounded soldier on the bed.

I was still attending the patient when an enemy plane roared up and started machine-gunning the house, the bullets coming through the flimsy tile roof and badly built brick and plaster walls as if they were paper. When it had kept this up for some time, circling back again and again and finally opening up with shell-fire, it became evident that the plane really was concentrating on the house for some reason or other. There was a nice deep ditch just outside, so I decided that it was best to take the patient there. I did not like moving him more than necessary for fear of starting a haemorrhage, but it seemed the lesser of two evils. So, choosing a moment when the plane had swept past and not yet returned, a Palestinian, who had remained with me, and I each grabbed one end of the blanket on which the patient was lying and carried him out. We managed to get him into the ditch and to tumble into it ourselves before the plane circled round. The latter was soon back again and kept up its machine-gunning for some time. I think it was trying to set fire to the house as many of the bullets were tracers, but, although the cottage was full of inflammable material, by some fluke it did not succeed. Finally the plane made off,

and soon afterwards the stretcher arrived to remove the wounded man to the C.C.S.

On returning to Major Murray's H.Q. I learned that news had just come through that parachutists had landed just west of us and were moving in our direction. Fifty or sixty of the Palestinians, all those who had rifles, were ordered to take up positions along 42nd Street and shoot any of the enemy who might appear. However, although we heard small-arms fire coming from quite close to the west, no Germans turned up.

About 3 p.m. enemy air activity seemed to redouble in violence. I could see parachutists falling like flocks of geese to the south-west of us, but fortunately far away. What concerned us more was that the enemy bombers again pounced on us and started to bomb and machine-gun the groves all around, especially those near the junction of 42nd Street and the Suda—Canea main road. Several planes also started to comb the woods near the light-railway lines for the dumps which they knew or guessed were there.

Suddenly there were a couple of crashing detonations and two red flashes lit up the whole sky while a pall of thick heavy black smoke rolled upwards. This was followed by more explosions and more black smoke until we were cut off to the west and the south-west by a towering black curtain. It was not difficult to guess that one or more petrol-dumps had gone up. After the explosions came a curious metallic crackling and banging, something like sheet-iron being hit rapidly with a hammer, which went on for a long time and which was caused, I suppose, by petrol-tins bursting one after the other in the heat. As soon as the first dump went up, several more planes hurried eagerly to the spot like vultures, and they too started bombing and machine-gunning all over the place

until two more dumps exploded. The wind was blowing the smoke over us like a canopy and so thickly that it soon grew as dark as late evening. Then the smoke began to billow along the ground till we were enveloped in a black, evil-smelling fog, dense enough at times to obliterate everything within a few yards of one. It reminded me of descriptions of the last days of Pompeii. There were moments when I really thought that I was going to be choked as the smoke caught me by the throat, and I could have kicked myself for having forgotten my gas-mask at our old camp. Fortunately however the smoke did not become quite thick enough to be really dangerous.

Just then there was another scare. The dumps had set fire to the olive groves and a strong wind was carrying the flames towards us. But by good luck the wind veered round just in time and blew the flames back over the already-burnt-out area, so that what looked like being a very extensive conflagration went out by itself or was easily mastered.

When the smoke was at its thickest, a dispatch-rider dashed up with the news that the Germans were advancing under cover of the smoke and landing more parachutists, and we were instructed to be doubly on the alert. I do not know if this alarm had any foundation or not, but anyway once again we saw nothing of the enemy, which did not disappoint me in the least. Finally night fell and the dumps burnt themselves out or were extinguished. The German planes departed, as usual, about nightfall.

The next morning, May the 22nd, Major Murray received orders to move his men up to Chikalaria, a small village on the high ground behind Suda. This he proceeded to do in small parties so as not to attract the

attention of the enemy planes, which had returned punctually at daybreak.

Soon bombing and machine-gunning began again all over the countryside, but principally towards Canea and to the south-west of that town. Every now and then aircraft would come our way, and then three officers of the Palestinians and I, who had not yet left for Chikalaria, would dive hastily into a slit-trench which had been dug in the garden beneath some orange trees. And there we would crouch while the planes shuttled to and fro overhead. We noticed that when a plane was ready to launch its bombs, a long oblong hatch (the bomb-door) would open in the under-side of the fuselage. So when we saw a plane with a gaping black strip beneath it we looked out for squalls, otherwise we breathed a sigh of relief.

It was gruesomely fascinating to watch the black specks falling from the bomb-bay, sometimes in succession (sticks) and sometimes in clusters (salvoes); one could follow them for an appreciable distance before their gathering speed caused them to be lost to the eye. Then, after a breathless interval, all hell would break loose in a shattering upheaval from the earth below. If the bombs were launched from directly overhead, we knew we were all right, as we could see them slanting away from us in the direction of the plane's flight. But if we saw those sinister black specks detach themselves from the plane *before* the latter had swept by above us, then we ducked our heads, clenched our teeth, and hoped for the best.

Planes were also busy above Suda Bay bombing shipping, and the Bofors around Suda were firing back, but, though their aim seemed fairly accurate at times, we never had the pleasure of seeing a German brought down. Generally the Bofors tracer shells were well below and

behind their target—at least that is what it looked like to me.

About 6 p.m. there was a lull, and a small truck drove up with some rations for the Palestinians; it gave Major Murray and me and two or three of the men who had not yet left a lift as far as Chikalaria. 42nd Street was a sunken road overshadowed by olive trees for a great part of the way, so we pulled up under a tree whenever aircraft showed signs of coming too close. About three-quarters of an hour later we reached Chikalaria without mishap.

Chikalaria was a pretty little village of perhaps five hundred inhabitants, built on the north slope of a hill about one mile south-south-west of Suda. The streets were crooked and narrow, the one- or two-storied houses were old and had little projecting porches and balconies, and their fissured walls were daubed with white or blue plaster. A pot of scarlet geraniums bloomed in many of the windows, and dignified cats and flustered hens still hung around the doorways as in peacetime. Chikalaria was about five hundred feet above sea-level, and the western end of Suda Bay, Suda village, the plain as far as Canea and the hillier countryside beyond to the west and the south-west was spread out like a beautiful panorama. Heavy small-arms fire could be heard from Acrotiri, the hill just across Suda Bay, and we learnt that some parachutists had also landed there and were now being mopped up.

Chikalaria's inhabitants had remained in the village and its life seemed to be going on fairly normally. There was a fountain with very pure mountain water, and women were coming to fill their pitchers and enjoy their usual evening gossip. It was surprising how calmly the villages were taking all the din and uproar which was

going on in the valley just below. It was rather as if they considered it another world which could not possibly affect them in any way, as if the terrible reality had not impressed itself upon their consciousness. Possibly they were trying, ostrich-like, *not* to believe in what they saw. Their village had not been bombed or machine-gunned yet, so why go out to meet trouble half-way! It will always come soon enough.

It was certainly strange to look down and see the valley below all full of dust, smoke, and explosions, and yet for everything to be so peaceful where I now stood. It gave me the eerie sensation of being in a dream. German planes were still circling above the olive groves I had just left, some of them so low that they were actually below my present level, and I could see the black crosses on the *upper* surface of their wings. And everywhere boiled bombs and destruction, with the desultry streaks of the Bofors spitting vainly back.

Suda Bay was a melancholy sight. Besides H.M.S. *York*, there were also two destroyers half a dozen merchantmen, and ten or twelve other craft, big or small, in a more or less disabled condition. Some of them were burning furiously and sending tall columns of black and white smoke up into the sky. Among the half-submerged ships I recognized our old friend the *Julia*. As on the previous day, the enemy planes disappeared northwards at about 8 p.m. and gave us a much-needed rest.

Major Murray, Captain James, Captain Rose, and one or two other officers had found accommodation in a small peasant house on the village main street. But, as the place was built mostly of wood, I suspected that it would be full of bugs, more especially as I found traces of these pests on the walls. In spite of being a naturalist, I have an almost pathological horror of bugs, and decided that of

two ills I preferred to run the risk of freezing than that of being eaten alive. So I retired under an olive tree where I had the good fortune to find a big pile of clean straw. I had annexed a derelict blanket in the Palestinian camp, and one of the other officers lent me his great-coat, and with all these luxuries I made myself a nice soft bed and did not feel too cold. Chikalaria, as I soon discovered to my cost, was full of mosquitoes. Most of them were *Culex*, but I also found some *Anopheles* larvae (*A. bifurcatus*, I think) in the village fountain overflow pool.

Before turning in I had one last look round. The hulls of the vessels burning in the bay were outlined by a dull red rim of flame, which every now and then would flicker dimmer or brighter. Occasionally, when something more inflammable ignited in the holds, a yellow-white flare burst suddenly upwards in a shower of sparks and illuminated the surrounding shore. Flashes and muffled reports came from Acrotiri Hill where the parachutists, who had landed there the previous day, were still defending themselves. A slight rise in the ground south-west of Canea, where the local prison buildings stood, had been captured by the Germans, and all round it soared a continuous succession of Very-lights and flares; white, green, yellow, and red, appearing and disappearing now here and now there like a dance of distant fireflies. These mingled with long slow-moving beaded streaks, probably tracer-bullets, and with isolated sparkles of reddish flame from mortar shells. On the whole, however, it seemed to me that the front was fairly quiet, and as yet I felt no misgivings as to the final outcome of the battle. So I crept into my straw with comparative peace of mind and was soon sleeping as heavily as the dead.

I awoke at about 6 a.m., May the 23rd. Everything was quiet except for the swarms of mosquitoes buzzing round

my head. But towards 6.30 I heard the familiar distant drone growing louder every minute till planes seemed to pour into the sky from the north, the north-east, and the north-west. I counted about fifty of them and then they crossed and recrossed each other so often that I gave up the job—the heavens were just full of circling aircraft. A few ack-ack guns opened fire, but with no results as far as I could see.

Suddenly there was another landing of parachutists to the south-west. (These may have been only parachutes with supplies, but they were too far for accurate observation.) I saw the light glimmer for a few seconds on the descending umbrellas, and at the same time there was a curious twinkling in the air as if a shower of silver-paper scraps had been scattered around. These little bright specks glittered and sparkled for an appreciable time as they rose and fell in the morning sun. I could not make out their nature and, so far, I have not met anyone who could explain them. Some have suggested that the appearance was due to the talc powder used in packing the parachutes in their containers, but the particles were too bright for this to be likely. It is more probable that the Germans were scattering leaflets.

As, on the whole, there seemed to be a lull in our vicinity, I seized the opportunity to have a medical inspection of the 606th Palestinian and the 1,005th Cyprus Pioneer Companies. The former was sheltering under trees and bushes in a nearby ravine and the latter was similarly established in another ravine about two-thirds of a mile away, towards Suda. Incidentally, there were several British (U.K., Australian, and New Zealand) tented camps on either side of the road joining Chikalaria and Suda, and a few British troops were billeted in Chikalaria itself.

I was pleased to find Captain Longridge and the other officers in good health; they had been joined by Major Reid and Captain Germenakos with their men, and were sheltering amidst the rocks and bushes in a deep ravine which scarred the mountainside just south of Suda. I got back my batman, Antonios Kokkinos, who was one of the few of our men to be armed with a rifle, and who had taken part in the fighting around Monastery Camp. He told me that there had been quite a hot engagement between our former camp and the wireless station. U.K. and Australian detachments together with our twenty men and about twenty more from other Cypriot companies, had mopped up an isolated body of enemy paratroops. Kokkinos mentioned that he himself had shot two Germans, and I believed him because I had known him in the old Western Desert days as a tough sort of fellow and no idle boaster. The name Kokkinos, 'the Red', suited him perfectly, as he was tall, lanky, and red-haired, with a frank, clean-shaven face, reddish-brown eyes, and a lot of brown freckles against a rather pale skin. He was always a willing worker, and popular both with the officers and the men, and I heard that he was subsequently mentioned in despatches for his good conduct in Libya and in Crete.

There was a very efficient tented Naval First-aid Post under the olive trees on the left-hand side of the road from Chikalaria at the bend where it curved to enter Suda village. Here I was able to obtain some much-needed acriflavine, bismuth and soda tablets, gauze, and cotton-wool. I also visited the C.C.S. in Suda to inquire about the wounded Palestinian I had sent there the day before, but I was sorry to learn that he had died during the morning.

This C.C.S. was under the direction of Captain E. T.

Gilbert, R.A.M.C., an excellent surgeon as well as a capable pathologist. With only two orderlies, he had to look after as many as a hundred or more wounded at a time, and see to their evacuation on board the destroyers which slipped into Suda Bay during the night. I helped him to extract a tommy-gun bullet from a wounded Maori's shoulder—my 'help' consisting in doing exactly what I was told—and received in return some very useful triangular bandages.

Captain Gilbert's C.C.S., which was situated in a detached two-story building divided into several small shops, had some very narrow escapes from the bombing, and the iron roller-shutters on the ground floor had been warped and holed by blast and splinters.

I returned to Major Murray's billet, which also served as officers' mess, in time for lunch. Although we were supposed to be on reduced rations, there was still much more than I could eat. The rations continued to be excellent and included Maconochie's M & V, biscuits, and tinned pineapple; we were able too to get eggs, fresh vegetables, and bread from the villagers, who were always very helpful and who even brought us a couple of chickens now and then.

During the afternoon a Palestinian's rifle went off by accident and the bullet ricocheted from a rock and hit a passing Cypriot Pioneer in the left buttock just above the head of the femur. The bullet had apparently been tumbling over and over endways in flight, as it made a very nasty jagged wound, which was serious though not actually dangerous. It was urgent, however, to get him to hospital, so I had him carried to the Naval First-aid Post near Suda, where I had been told to send all cases requiring immediate treatment. On arriving there, I learnt that orders had recently been received for all casualties to go

to a R.N. Tented Hospital which was somewhere in the vicinity.

An ambulance was just leaving for this hospital with another patient, and, as there was no medical orderly available at that moment, I climbed aboard the ambulance myself. I wished to keep an eye on my patient, and I thought too that this would be a good opportunity to visit the hospital where he was going and find out what accommodation it might have for future emergencies. When the ambulance started, I discovered that very little could be seen of the outside world through the tiny windows, also that there was something wrong with the door-handle, which would not open from inside. I wondered what would happen if the need were to arise of leaving the ambulance in a hurry, and I cannot say that I felt very comfortable. Luckily the afternoon was unusually quiet and, although there was some brisk bombing now and then, none of the explosions sounded anywhere near.

Our destination seemed further away than I had expected, but finally the ambulance came to a halt and let me out. To my surprise, I caught sight of the familiar masts of the wireless station near Monastery Camp looming above the trees in the near vicinity. I thought it rather strange to bring casualties *towards* the fighting line instead of away from it, but I concluded that there must be some good reason for this,. The hospital was already pretty well crowded and the staff was working at high pressure, so I took my departure as soon as I saw that my patients were in good hands.

The ambulance was not going back to Suda as it was urgently required elsewhere, and consequently I was obliged to return on foot. I thought that I knew the way, but, in taking a short cut through the olive groves, I evidently bore too much to the north and suddenly found

myself near the outskirts of Canea. There were signs of a skirmish having taken place here quite recently as about half a dozen Germans were lying around, no doubt parachutists as they were dressed in blue-grey overalls, grey trousers, high boots with thick rubber soles, and round helmets. I did not see any British dead, these (if any) had already been removed. Incidentally, none of the dead parachutists had turned blue, as it had sometimes been rumoured, from the effects of stimulating drugs administered before battle.

All the German corpses had been searched, either by Intelligence, by souvenir-hunters, or by the local inhabitants, and I did not find anything of interest on them; nor were there any tommy-guns, field-glasses, or other valuable articles anywhere near. I picked up a flat metal box, about the size of a cigarette-case, which had contained small white rectangular tablets, a number of which lay scattered around. I guessed that these were some sort of concentrated food and gathered as many as I could find, about three dozen, as I thought that they might come in useful some day. This they certainly did later on. These tablets were each stamped with the word 'Dextrosan' (or something similar) and had a sugary taste with a slight flavour of peppermint. There was also a canvas bag full of little cubes, about one inch square, of a bread-like substance with a very thick crust; but I did not take any of these as I did not know if their food value was worth their bulk. I found too a cardboard sheath containing a little glass tube of a pinkish iodine compound labelled 'Sepso-Tinktur', a small tube of vaseline, and some field dressings, all of which were a welcome addition to my dwindling stock of first-aid necessities.

I would have liked to do some more exploring as I particularly wanted a pair of prismatic field-glasses to re-

place the ones I had lost in Greece, but it was getting late, and I did not think it prudent to wander about in the dark, especially as I did not know the password. I eventually reached the main road near Tobruk Avenue, and was lucky enough to get a lift in a lorry as far as Suda. It was quite dark by the time I reached Chikalaria, but fortunately I was not challenged anywhere on the way.

On my return I found a patient waiting for me. A Palestinian had struck a match in the dark to light a cigarette and somebody had fired at the flame. He was more frightened than hurt, however, as the bullet had only grazed his ribs, cutting a slight gash in his skin and slitting his shirt and tunic. I have always thought it strange how some people will insist on lighting matches even when hostile planes might be hovering or snipers lurking near. But the Australians had a short way of dealing with this sort of thing: they would just fire at the flame! This is what had probably happened in this particular case as we had some Australians for close neighbours. But the shot may also have been fired by one of the isolated parachutists who were occasionally taken prisoner far behind our lines. As a matter of fact, the Australian brand of deterrent was very effective, but it was sometimes overdone as car headlights were fired on even though dimmed almost to extinction. A remonstrance actually appeared in General Orders shortly before the German attack stressing that 'this practice must cease forthwith', as legitimate traffic was being held up on the roads.

Before turning in, I had another look at the ground held by the enemy around the prisons. I could see the same Very-lights, flares, and tracers, but, though I tried to make myself believe that it was not so, it seemed to me that they covered a somewhat greater area than on the previous night.

That night was fairly calm as far as I can remember, but the usual circus began again soon after sunrise on May the 24th. During the morning I went down for sick parade to the ravine which sheltered the 1,005th Cyprus Pioneer Company. There was a small single-roomed hut built of sun-dried bricks not far from the lower end of this ravine. It was being used as the 1,005th Company's Q.M. Stores, and I noticed that it contained quite an abundance of rations and supplies.

A peasant hurried up to this hut before my departure and begged me to come and see a civilian who had been wounded by a machine-gun bullet from a passing plane. He led me to a cave in a limestone outcrop some way up the hillside where thirty or more civilians from Suda, men, women, and children, were living crowded together under squalid and insanitary conditions. They had taken refuge in this cave from the bombing, and the only things that many of them had brought were a blanket or two and a few cooking-utensils which were used more or less in common. Some of the luckier ones had saved a corded trunk or a few sticks of furniture which lay scattered among the rocks and bushes; others had rescued their household pets, a dog, a kitten, a few chickens, a canary, even a green Amazon parrot in a brass cage.

The casualty was an oldish man of about sixty who had received a bullet through the fleshy part of the leg; no bone or important vessel had been injured, however, and it only required to be dressed. The patient took the whole affair very philosophically and told me that he had fought in the two Balkan Wars, in the First World War, in Russia, and in Asia Minor, and had been wounded already twice before. He was not very complimentary when speaking of General Metaxas, the late Greek Dictator. His opinion was voiced more or less as follows: 'We Cretans

have always been used to bearing arms. Every Cretan had his rifle which was as dear to him as his sweetheart. Then this old baboon of a Metaxas came along and, because he was afraid that we might revolt against his dictatorship, he passed a law making it a crime for anyone to possess firearms. Some of us hid our rifles, but many, not wishing to have trouble with the police, handed them in to the authorities. Now see the result! We are attacked in our own homes and we haven't weapons to defend them. If only we had our rifles we would already have driven these German swine into the sea!' All the others present fully agreed with his opinion. Metaxas was distinctly not liked in Crete, even if he was ever popular anywhere else in Greece—which I emphatically doubt.

Incidentally, I heard from many British officers, both during the fighting in Crete and afterwards, that the local inhabitants had fought back fiercely against the invaders and inflicted severe losses on them. Everywhere the military authorities, both British and Greek, were besieged by people clamouring for arms; unfortunately there was not enough to go round. I learnt too that at Herakleion and Rethymnon the civil population and the few Greek troops in the island had been of great help in defeating the German parachutists who had landed in those areas.

I remained half an hour or more talking with these refugees. Some of them had been living in that cave for several weeks, others only for a few days, but all had tales of terror and desolation to relate. Many of the women had lost husbands, brothers, or sons in the fighting in Albania before the German attack on Crete; others had seen their children killed before their eyes during the bombing raids on Suda and its outskirts.

These unfortunate people seemed to spend much of their time singing endless folk-songs, no doubt to distract

their minds from the dread present and from their dreary surroundings. It was for them an escape into a happier past as many of their songs had for theme the daring deeds of the *Klephts*, those guerrilla fighters of the mountains who had done so much to free Greece from the Turks during the long War of Independence of 1821-30.

Some of these songs were already known to me, as I had once made a special study of Greek folk-lore; it was, however, an unforgettable experience to hear my favourite ballads in such a dramatic setting. The following somewhat free translation is a typical example of the semi-historical epics of the Klephtic Cycle:

THE KLEPHT'S DEATH

Comrades, I am sorely wounded; fold a cloak beneath my head,
And with fronds of fir and bracken make me up a fragrant bed.
Bid the minstrel sing my death-song—Death I welcome as a guest,
For I saw the foeman fleeing ere the bullet found my breast.
Comrades, hear my dying wishes: When my life has ebbed away,
Carry me to yonder hilltop where the snow-clouds gather grey,
Where the winds for ever whisper to the fir trees standing tall,
And the jewelled rainbows glimmer on the misty waterfall.
Dig my grave on yonder mountain, on its summit I would dwell
That I may keep watch for ever o'er the haunts I loved so well.

Bury me beneath the heather standing on my feet upright,
Place by me my sword and flintlock—in the Shades I yet would fight.
At my right hand leave a loophole that the breeze may waft to me
From the vales the drifting fragrance of the flowering orange tree,
Leave a loophole that my weapons may reflect the sun's glad beams,
And the distant roar of battle find an echo in my dreams.

In the above song a peculiar view of the Hereafter should be noted: The soul of the dead warrior returns to keep watch over the haunts he loved best during life; this theme is met with in many of the Klephtic ballads and is a characteristic of this form of folk-poetry.

It is a curious fact that, in general, all Greek folk-songs reveal a purely pagan concept of the life beyond the grave. The souls of the dead are apparently relegated to a nebulous subterranean abode, still retaining the classical names of Tartarus and Hades, where they for ever mourn their past existence lived 'in the sweet world of light'.

Do the swallows bring the springtime? Do sweet blossoms deck the ways?
Do brave youths yet dance with maidens as they danced in other days?

In other versions, the soul drinks of the waters of Lethe and forgets its past life and the loved ones it left behind upon earth.

. . . I shall meet thee nevermore,
I am lost to thee, beloved, I am but a dream of yore.

I have crossed the springs of Lethe where the youth
greets not his love,
Where the child forgets its mother, and the dead the
world above.

Charon too has a place in these songs, but he is no longer the surly old boatman of the Styx. He has become the personification of Death himself, a gigantic 'Black Horseman' who snatches with his own hands the souls delivered to him by Fate.

By their locks the youths and maidens, elders takes he
by the hand,
Children holds he on his saddle as he gallops o'er the
land.

I have often conversed with Greek country folk, nominally of the Greek Orthodox faith, to try and find out if their beliefs tallied more closely with the mythology of their folk-songs or with the tenets of their professed religion. It was obvious in most cases that those whom I addressed inclined towards the more pagan outlook, though their views on the after-life were usually vague and uncertain. As one of them once put it, they were so busy *living* that it just did not occur to them to speculate on the hereafter.

The idea of reward or punishment meted out after death seemed quite foreign to their philosophy. The same fate was reserved for all—a nebulous dream-life in some dim Netherworld (*Kato Kosmos*), troubled by vague longings for the past and for the lost light of day. Only in a few regions of Greece—Epirus for instance—does the belief still persist that an exceptionally wicked person is transformed at death into a *vrycolax* (vampire), an 'un-

dead' being who must batten upon the blood of the living to prolong his mirage existence.

It was interesting, yet pitiful, to observe how deeply the pagan viewpoint coloured, consciously or subconsciously, the whole outlook of these people in their cavern refuge. They spoke resignedly of their dead as though their dear ones still lived and breathed, but as exiles in a distant land, a strange and formless country which held out no promise of a glad reunion to temper the present heartache. To them sorrow revealed itself in all its stark realism without even the illusion of hope.

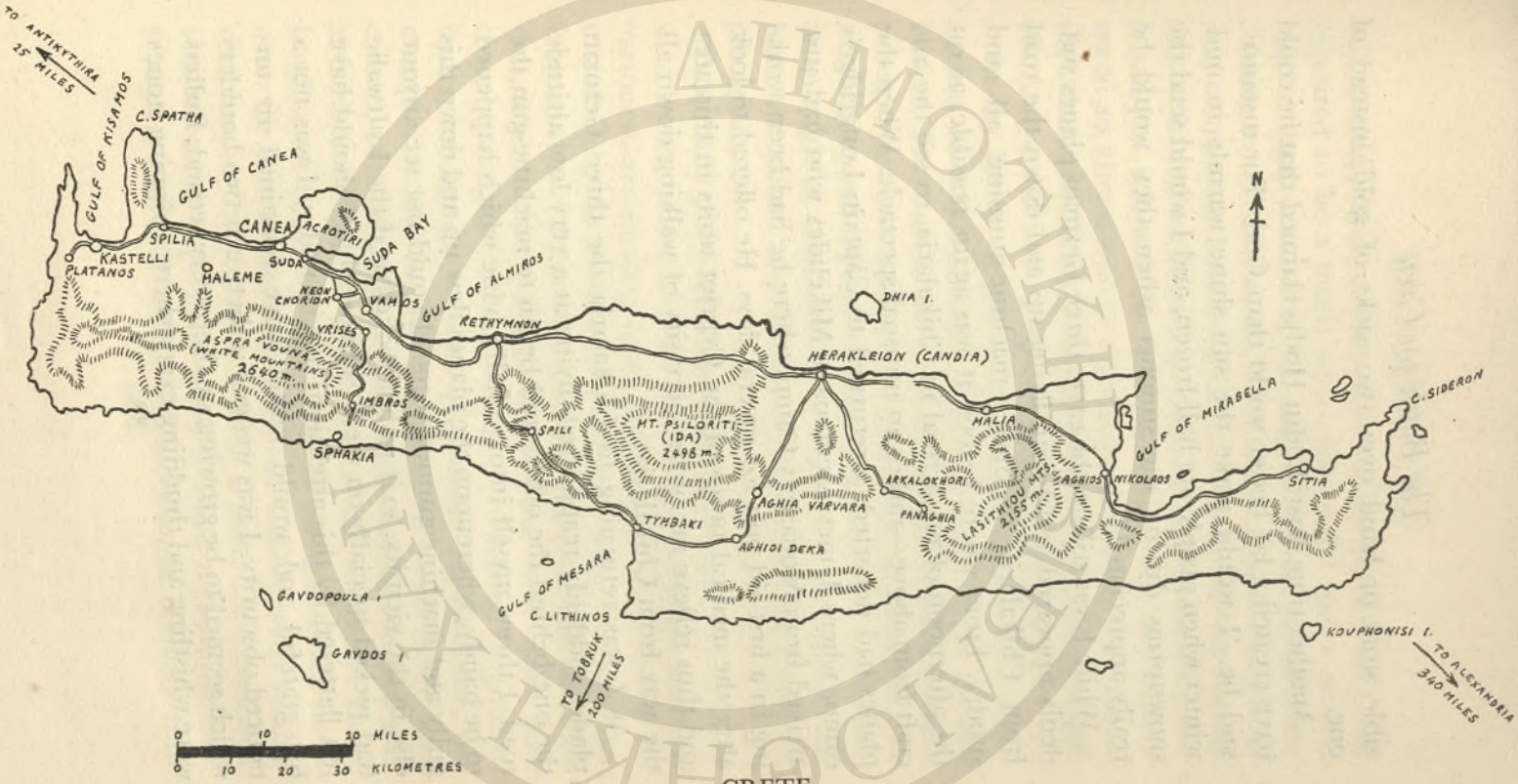
I noticed, however, that this little community was not by any means entirely given over to gloom. Every now and then a burst of laughter announced the telling of another Nasr' Eddin Hodja story by one of the group. Nasr' Eddin Hodja, a mythical sage of Asia Minor, is famous all over the Near and Middle East. He is the hero of innumerable adventures in which his character is represented as a mixture of shrewdness and childish innocence, the former predominating.

The following examples are typical of the Nasr' Eddin Hodja brand of humour:

The Sultan, wishing to have a little fun at the expense of his subjects, once proclaimed that anyone who could tell him a really impossible story would receive a sack of gold as his reward. All the greatest liars in the kingdom immediately hurried to the palace, but the Sultan airily dismissed them and their most outrageous falsehoods with the words: 'Oh, that's quite possible.'

Finally Nasr' Eddin Hodja appeared before the Sultan and said: 'Your Majesty, I have come to claim the *two* sacks of gold you once borrowed from me and which you promised to repay to me upon this very day.'

The Sultan had to admit that this was an impos-



CRETE

Greatest length 160 *miles.* *Greatest breadth* 35 *miles.* *Population* 442,000

sible story or hand over two sacks of gold instead of one.

Another time Nasr' Eddin Hodja claimed that he could have created a far better world than God. 'For instance', said he, 'I would make the sun shine warmly in mid-winter when people are half-frozen, and I would send the snowstorms during the summer when they would be really appreciated.'

While I was still in the cave, three German planes suddenly appeared and began flying up and down the road from Chikalaria to Suda, machine-gunning all and sundry. From where I stood it was again possible, as on the afternoon of my arrival in Chikalaria, to see the aircraft from above—rather an unusual spectacle. When the planes had departed, I returned to Captain Longridge's camp, where I met Lieutenant Mikelides who had just arrived from Monastery Camp, where he had been working in a first-aid post for several days. He offered to look after the medical needs of the Cypriot units in this area and thus relieve me of the necessity of walking down all the way from Chikalaria.

As I was returning to Chikalaria the three German planes suddenly reappeared, flying at a very low altitude the one behind the other, and began to machine-gun the road. I threw myself into a small ravine which happened to be handy, whereupon the planes flew up and down this gully and machine-gunned it too. I could not see anyone else in the vicinity, so it rather looked as if the Luftwaffe had picked specially on me. I suppose that I should have felt flattered by this attention, but in reality I was not a bit grateful and would rather have remained in unnoticed obscurity. I was wedged in between two boulders which seemed to be growing smaller every second. Bullets were whistling and thudding everywhere, chipping stones

and cutting leaves off bushes, and a few yards away there appeared to be a much safer rock, and I had a perfect itch to dash over to it. At last, when the planes were circling some distance off, I did streak across. The planes may or may not have noticed the movement, but anyway they returned with a swoop. And then I felt that the place I had just left was the better one after all, and experienced an almost uncontrollable urge to rush back again. However, after firing a few more bursts, the planes pushed off. And so did I the moment the coast was clear.

In my hurry to get away, I barked my shins badly against something which had been cast aside in the bushes. This turned out to be a primitive-looking peasant plough, just a roughly shaped bough from a tree with a smaller lopped-off branch projecting from its under-side at an angle of about forty-five degrees. This branch had been sharpened and hardened in the fire to form the ploughshare.

Not many years ago these wooden ploughs were widely used by the peasants in all the Balkan countries, and the various Governments concerned had great difficulty in introducing the modern iron spade-plough. The peasants insisted that the iron ploughshare 'poisoned' the soil and that, after a few bumper crops, their land 'died' and ceased to be productive. They were, of course, laughed at by the modernists for their pig-headed 'superstition', yet events have shown that the peasants' observation was correct, even though their interpretation of the facts was at fault. It needed the catastrophe of the American 'Dust-bowl' areas to prove that the spade plough, which *turns over* the sod, is unsuited for poor shallow soils in dry climates, as the precious top-soil is soon desiccated and blows away as impalpable dust. In these regions the disc-plough is the only satisfactory pattern, as it cuts a thin

furrow in the earth without turning it over and thus dissipating its all too scanty moisture. The derided wooden plough of the Balkan peasant had been affording him this advantage many centuries before the discoveries of the modern agricultural expert.

Before reaching Chikalaria, I noticed that some newcomers had encamped in one of the olive groves just east of the village. They turned out to be the 1,005th Dock Operating Company, and I was pleased to see Captain Urquhart and several of the other officers. The unit had been fairly in the thick of things in the fighting west of Monastery Camp and had sustained several casualties. I also saw Lance-Corporal Smith, the medical orderly whom I had evacuated to the 7th General Hospital for a gastric disorder. He told me that he had had a very rough time. The German paratroops had landed right in the hospital grounds and had forced some of the staff and patients, including Lance-Corporal Smith, to act as a screen for them as they advanced against the New Zealanders. A certain number of hospital personnel and patients were killed or wounded during the struggle until the New Zealanders managed to rescue them. Lance-Corporal Smith had escaped during the fighting, and had decided that he did not like being in hospital at all. So he discharged himself, gastritis or no gastritis, and returned to his unit.

On my return to the mess, I found that we had guests, as Major Pitcairn and his company had established themselves in a ravine to the west of Chikalaria and he and two of his officers had dropped in to lunch. They too had seen brisk fighting, and all the men of the 1,006th Cyprus Pioneer Company who possessed rifles had helped to beat back the Germans in the Galatas area and had sustained some casualties. Major Pitcairn gave us the latest news he had heard: That the Germans had tried to land by means

of *caiques* on the night of the 21st and had been smashed by the Navy. Rumour had it that the Germans had lost 70,000 men. (The real figures were between 2,000 and 5,000! But we did not know this at the time.) This cheered us all up considerably. It was the only piece of news, authentic or otherwise, that we had heard since the air attacks started.

That afternoon I had a visit from Lieutenant-Colonel Dolan, who told me to establish a first-aid post at the western end of Chikalaria, and to evacuate any wounded who might come my way either through Captain Gilbert or through the Naval first-aid post near Suda.

Fortunately Corporal Tobin, the medical orderly of the 606th Palestinian Pioneer Company, had returned to his unit that morning—he had been helping Captain Gilbert for a few days—and I took him over, together with a private of the same company who had some idea of first-aid work. Corporal Tobin was a Jew who had studied medicine in Germany before the Nazi persecution; he was a third-year student and an excellent man to work with as he was willing, energetic, and efficient.

Helped by Corporal Tobin, the emergency medical orderly, and my batman Kokkinos, I found a suitable two-roomed peasant hut, with a kitchen and an adjacent well, which we turned into as workmanlike a first-aid post as we could manage with the means at our disposal. The owner, who lived in a nearby cottage, did all he could to help us, and even brought us a couple of iron bedsteads, complete with mattresses, and some planks to make several more rough couches. He also supplied us with pots and pans for heating water and for cooking.

We had chosen a house partially shaded by trees and situated in a slight hollow so that the first-aid post should be as inconspicuous as possible from air and distant

ground observation. Incidentally, Major Murray's H.Q. was situated at the east and higher end of the village, and was quite open to the north and west as it overlooked a sharp slope. From this house we could see in the distance all the ground held by the Germans, and in consequence an enemy observer, armed with a pair of good prismatics, could quite easily have seen the officers and men who were continually entering and leaving our mess. A similar state of affairs would have brought down a storm of shells during the First World War, but here, somewhat to my surprise, nothing happened. It is probable that the Germans did not have sufficient long-range guns as yet, or else they had more important plans in hand and did not think it worth while to waste time and ammunition on small fry like us. But I never quite got over my feeling of apprehension whenever I looked out of our front-door and marked the lie of the land.

The sky had been more or less overcast during the day with an occasional drop of rain. Everyone was praying for a good, heavy downpour, as this would make things more difficult for the German troop-carrier aircraft who were landing all the time at Maleme—one every five or six minutes according to some accounts. But of course it never did rain properly all that month. There was, if I remember rightly, another descent of parachutists at about 4 p.m. in the same area as before, and again I saw the glittering particles like fluttering scraps of silver paper.

That night was less quiet than the previous ones. We heard heavy bombing from the direction of Maleme and guessed that R.A.F. bombers were in action; we wondered why they had not come earlier or more frequently. A British 6- or 8-inch gun (some said that it had been brought ashore from H.M.S. *York*) also started firing from the olive groves near the western extremity of Suda Bay.

This gun kept on shooting most of the night; a terrific flash and a loud report every five or six minutes, followed a minute or so later by the distant thud of the exploding shell in hostile territory.

Next morning, May the 25th, the enemy was even more active than usual. Not only was the bombing and machine-gunning heavier, but much more of it came our way, and all the area between Canea and the wireless station received a concentrated plastering. Relays of aircraft could be seen arriving in succession, thirty to fifty at a time, and launching their bombs until the ground below was blotted out by smoke and upflung debris. Some of the planes too were apparently searching for the heavy gun near Suda Bay, as they pounded all that region with bombs, setting fire to the olive trees and to a coppice of pines.

Suda was also attacked, and every now and then aircraft would roar up and down the coastal area, machine-gunning everything in sight. Chikalaria received its share and a few houses were set on fire by tracer-bullets; but the villagers, who still behaved with remarkable coolness, extinguished the blaze before it could spread. I had to attend to several civilians who were wounded by machine-gun bullets, the most serious case being that of a lad of fifteen who was shot through both legs.

It was, I think, when returning from this casualty that I was surprised to hear an old peasant woman greeting a neighbour whom she evidently disliked with these words: 'Why are you snooping around here again—do you think you're Serlok Homs?' Out of curiosity, I asked the old lady who she thought 'Serlok Homs' was. She replied with some surprise: '*You* ought to know that. He's the chief of the London secret police.'

Lieutenant-Colonel Wright, Inspector of the Cyprus

Regiment, had lunch with us that day. He told us that he had heard that things were not going at all badly and that 'the situation was in hand'. The Germans had been completely mopped up at Herakleion, Rethymnon, and Canea, and now only held the areas around Maleme and the prisons. All their sea convoys had been sunk, so it was only a question of days before they would have to give in for want of food and munitions. It had apparently been calculated that the Germans in Crete would need at least eighty to ninety transport planes a day to keep them supplied, and already the total destroyed daily had almost reached that figure. Consequently everything would turn out all right in the end.

As a matter of fact this spirit of optimism seemed to be more or less general at that time; even the wounded who passed through our first-aid post were cheerful. Some of them told me that they had heard from troops around Maleme that the enemy was already trying to evacuate his men by air, and that each time a plane arrived on the aerodrome there was a free fight among the Germans to scramble on board. Others said that several of our 'I' tanks had been brought up to Maleme; these would remain hidden during the bombing, but, as soon as the troop-carriers landed, they would wade in and smash them to bits. Everybody hoped and expected that things were going to take a sudden change for the better in the very near future. It was even rumoured that the R.A.F. was sending long-range fighters, equipped with auxiliary petrol-tanks, to mop up the enemy bombers. In fact several times during the afternoon, when a flight of aircarft appeared in the distance, the cry went up that thev were at last British and they were greeted with frantic cheers. Each time, however, instead of the much-longed-for red, white, and blue circles, we only saw the black

crosses of which we were so heartily sick. I have never felt a keener disappointment in the whole of my life.

At about 2 p.m. we were treated to a pleasant sight for a change. Several German aircraft were bombing Suda and apparently trying to knock out the Bofors ack-ack guns in that area. The latter were shooting back briskly and managed to score a direct hit on one of their assailants. I saw a plane come down suddenly at a very flat angle and hit the curving slope of the hill behind Suda Bay. It bounced several times along the ground in great bounds, raising clouds of dust and shedding bits of itself as it went. Then it disappeared behind a ridge and a few moments later a column of black smoke and an echoing explosion announced its complete destruction. Everyone was delighted, and in the twinkling of an eye the main street of Chikalaria was filled with a cheering crowd of soldiers and civilians.

Later on in the afternoon a lorry containing an officer and two privates with fixed bayonets pulled up in front of Major Murray's H.Q. to inquire where an intelligence officer could be found. They were escorting two German prisoners—paratroopers, as shown by their uniforms—who had been picked up while wandering around well to the east of Suda. I again noticed that the two prisoners, whose hair was clipped extremely short at the back of the head and left very bushy on top, were rather on the slight side as to build and appeared to be in their early twenties. In fact most of the Germans I had seen so far, whether dead or alive, were more or less what I would classify as 'weedy'. Perhaps I just chanced to see some of the poorer specimens, or possibly it was all an illusion due to expecting something bigger and burlier than the average run of humanity, owing to unconscious suggestion by years of German propaganda.

The Germans had begun to scatter great numbers of pamphlets all over the countryside. I saw some of these, printed both in English and in Greek, stating that the German High Command had learnt of instances of German paratroops being ill-treated and even killed by the local population. All sorts of reprisals were of course threatened if this should occur again. The greatest crime in a German's eyes is for his victim to dare to defend himself.

A little after 3 p.m. the enemy started something new. His bombers began launching a special kind of bomb into Suda Bay which came down with a peculiar prolonged wail—rather like the noise of a tram's brakes when it goes round a corner—and fell into the sea without exploding. I concluded that these were some type of magnetic, acoustic, or delayed-action mine directed against vessels that might enter the bay during the night. Too many of them were dropped for them to have been merely badly aimed bombs which had fallen into the sea by mistake. All through the afternoon we heard that banshee wail beginning above our heads and ending in the water with a loud plop and a splash. For some reason best known to themselves, the aircraft launched these bombs (or mines) from high up in the air behind Chikalaria so that they passed wailing just over our heads before reaching the bay. Each time we spent some nasty seconds wondering if the bomb would pass by once more or not.

Suda continued to be badly bombed and a large flour-mill was destroyed, killing and wounding a number of men who had been sheltering in it. Other planes, more numerous than ever before, roamed all over the countryside, bombing and machine-gunning at their own sweet will. How we all longed to see a few British fighters!

I was called to tend several more of the villagers who had been injured by machine-gun fire. One of them, an old woman, bled to death before I could do anything for her; she had a jagged wound in the throat caused probably by a ricocheting bullet. Another civilian, a man of about forty, reecived a nasty wound and burn in the left upper arm from a tracer. On the whole, though, the peasants were taking matters very calmly, and comparatively few had abandoned their homes.

The night was again rather lively. The big gun near Suda reopened fire on the German positions, and kept on shooting every five minutes or so during most of the night. R.A.F. bombers came over again and we heard muffled detonations towards Maleme, but not nearly as many as we would have liked. We also saw and heard distant explosions, coming apparently from behind the hills south-east of Suda, but we never learnt what had caused them. I noticed too that the area to the west of Canea from which Very lights and flares could be seen rising into the sky was again distinctly larger than the night before. This was not a pleasing spectacle.

On Monday, May the 26th, the enemy attack increased still more in intensity. The sky was always filled with the drone and roar of aircraft until one's head reeled. Planes were everywhere and nobody seemed to be able to move without a few of them bustling up. The sound of bombing and machine-gunning was incessant. The Germans strafed the whole Suda Bay area with redoubled fury, and it was pitiful to note how our ack-ack fire had dwindled, although a few Bofors still fought stubbornly back. Canea was savagely bombed and fires could be seen breaking out all over the town.

More and more wounded began to pass through our first-aid post. A wounded Australian sergeant described

with great glee a trick his unit had played on the Nazis. They had captured a large square of white cloth bearing a black swastika and had spread this out on the ground; German planes had then dropped them ammunition and supplies by parachute under the impression that the area had been occupied by their own troops. On the whole, though, I noticed a very distinct falling off of morale. Up till now the wounded had been fairly cheerful, and had taken it for granted that the 'Jerries' would be mopped up in a few days. But the later arrivals were moody and despondent, and particularly bitter against the R.A.F. for its surrender of the skies to the Germans. I heard jokes about the letters R.A.F. standing for 'Ruddy Absent Friends' (or another word beginning also with an F), and curses against the 'blighters' who had been in Crete for six months without preparing for an air-borne attack.

An ack-ack gunner, a lad of about twenty, told me that his gun had been attacked simultaneously by at least ten planes at Maleme and destroyed. He was one of the few survivors, and, although he had had practically no rest or sleep for a whole week, he had been assigned to another gun near Suda and this one too had been systematically bombed and knocked out. He kept on shouting, 'It's sheer bloody murder!' and got so excited that I was obliged to calm him down with an extra shot of morphia. He had been slightly wounded by bomb-splinters in the arm and shoulder, but his principal trouble was that his nerves had been strained to the breaking-point. And many of the others were in a similar condition.

There were also a certain number of Greek soldiers, mostly Cretans, among the wounded; one of them was a sergeant-major who had fought in 'Venizelos's Army' in Macedonia during the last World War. He was furious at the way that operations had been conducted in the

Maleme sector. 'They wouldn't let us Cretans attack, nor would they attack the Germans themselves!' he said. 'They gave them two whole days to dig themselves in before they tried to dislodge them. They should have rushed them at the very beginning and then they would have flattened them out. That's what we and the Australians did to them at Rethymnon; we mopped them up before they could get well settled.' Later on I heard similar opinions from British officers who held that the attack on the Germans at Maleme and the prisons area had been too long delayed. I do not know if this blame to the Higher Command was deserved or not, and just mention the rumours which were very prevalent at the time. It is probable that the whole truth will only come to light when the official story of the Cretan invasion is written by both sides.

Some of the walking wounded told me that they had come from a casualty-clearing station in an olive grove near Tobruk Avenue and that 'hundreds of wounded' were lying under the trees with practically no medical attention. This may have been an exaggeration, but, knowing the existing conditions and the acute shortage of medical personnel and supplies, I could well believe it.

Throughout the day the bombing of Canea, Suda, and the whole neighbourhood grew ever more violent. Several of the older houses in Chikalaria collapsed from blast alone, and I was afraid that our first-aid post would share the same fate at any moment. The floor was continually heaving and rocking, and the walls quivered and trembled. The few panes remaining in the windows were shattered, and we had to tie the wooden shutters with rope to prevent them from bursting their flimsy catches and flying open with each decompression wave. The whole landscape was erupting earth, smoke, and flame,

and all our ack-ack guns had been silenced except for an occasional shot from a couple of dogged Bofors near Suda.

The continuous noise and concussion made one feel sick and dazed, yet every nerve was on edge as in a nightmare. One's ears were cocked the whole time to judge the distance of each plane from the roar of its engine and the nearness of every bomb from the screech of its approach. And there was never any let-up of the tension; I wondered how the men who were facing the German infantry as well as the planes could possibly stand it. It is true that having a weapon in one's hands and hitting back tones up one's morale far more than sitting around without being able to have a crack at one's attackers. Small-arms fire could be heard in the few lulls of the bombing, and I noticed that it sounded still nearer than on the previous day, and that it had spread out further to the south. Hardly a reassuring state of affairs.

When night fell the German planes departed as usual except for an occasional prowler, and we were able to breathe more freely. Some of the ships in Suda Bay were still burning brightly, and this time another lurid glow was also visible. The whole of Canea seemed to be ablaze, and monstrous tongues of red and yellow flame were streaming up into the sky and writhing like gigantic boa-constrictors. I felt like Nero watching the burning of Rome.

The villagers too were gathered in stunned silence watching that holocaust, and I could sense that to them it was like the end of a world. Canea was the only town that many of them had ever known; it was their joy and their pride, and it was now crumbling to smoke and cinders before their very eyes! Some of the men had tears streaming down their faces and others shook their fists and cursed the Germans. But 'the old dodderer Metaxas'

had deprived them of their rifles, and the flower of Cretan manhood was dead in the Albanian mountains or captive across the sea, so what could they do except grind their teeth in impotent rage and plant in their hearts the seed of an implacable hatred? The Germans and their Italian stooges were later on to reap the whirlwind of this hatred during their uneasy occupation of the island.

When darkness fell, Captain Gilbert sent me a couple of lorries for the more seriously wounded, and I arranged for further batches of patients to be taken down by passing vehicles. Captain Gilbert certainly performed wonders; he had to collect the sick and wounded from several different localities, yet he was able to evacuate them all without a hitch on board the destroyers which nosed into Suda Bay during the night.

That same evening at about ten o'clock I received the shock of my life. I heard the tramp of a body of men approaching along the road from the west and suddenly heard some of them speaking to each other in *German*! It was a nasty jar until I realized that they were a working-party of Palestinians returning from the dumps near Tobruk Avenue. Many of the Palestinian Pioneers were German Jews who ordinarily spoke German among themselves; a few of them could speak no other language. I told the sergeant in charge of the party to advise his men to be more careful about speaking German in the dark for fear of regrettable accidents should they be overheard by anybody who believed in shooting first and inquiring afterwards. I have often wondered since if such a mistake ever occurred during those last hectic days in Crete and, if so, what were the consequences.

I cannot remember if the heavy gun near Suda Bay fired at all that night; I rather think that it did.

Tuesday morning, May the 27th, started with the

usual ominous roar in the heavens, first distant and then brain-shaking, as the Nazi air-armada swept in to its daily orgy of bombing and machine-gunning. It was incredible to think that only *one* week had elapsed since the first air-borne attack—it seemed more like months. The Germans dropped many more of their delayed-action mines (or whatever they were) into Suda harbour, and we heard them wailing over our heads and plopping into the sea with monotonous regularity. Canea, the wireless station area, the coast around Suda Bay, and Suda village were all mercilessly bombed by relays of aircraft. As on the previous days, each relay departed only when relieved by the following one, so that the skies were always full of planes wheeling and swooping and criss-crossing in all directions.

There was a further deterioration of the morale of the wounded who reached our first-aid post. There were more and more cases of men, and even officers, who had trifling or no apparent wounds, but who showed signs of concussion, extreme physical exhaustion, or complete nervous collapse. Some of them would fall asleep the moment I laid them down on the floor, and many had pulses very much faster or slower than the normal. Major Murray had given me some extra rations and a cook, and the latter was kept busy the whole time brewing hot tea which the patients gulped down avidly. The wounded still cursed the R.A.F. and the people who had been six months in Crete without preparing adequate defences. 'What could we do?' was the burden of their complaints. 'Each time we tried to attack, the bloody Stukas were down on us like a ton of bricks. Nobody could show his head above a slit-trench without being bombed and machine-gunned to hell. If only we could see one British fighter things would be quite different!'

Towards 7.30 p.m., Lieutenant-Colonel Dolan, the A.D.M.S., passed by in a truck, and I learnt from him that things were not going quite as well as could be hoped, but that there was still a chance that the present line might be held. He told me to send down as many of my wounded as I could to Captain Gilbert and to remain where I was until I received further instructions.

Later on in the evening I heard from Major Murray that he had received orders to move nearer to Suda, and that he and the other officers would spend the night in the hut where Captain Longridge kept his stores. The situation, according to him, was grave, but reinforcements were being rushed up, and he hoped that the tide of battle would soon turn in our favour. Another line of resistance was being prepared, in case the worst came to the worst, a few miles east of Suda, and Major Murray was confident that we could hold it indefinitely as it had much stronger natural defences than our present positions. All this sounded rather ominous to me.

Before saying good-bye, Captain Rose, our quartermaster, produced a brand-new pair of munition boots which he had been able to obtain for me with great difficulty and only after some expert wangling. For days I had been trying in vain to get hold of some boots to replace my own which had been worn through to such an extent that in places I was literally walking on my socks. The new pair was No. 10 instead of my usual 8½, but I cut out a pair of thick cardboard inner soles and hoped that this would prevent the boots from sliding about too much on my feet. In any case they were better than my old pair which would be useless for a long march, should a sudden change of scene be considered healthy in the near future. I thought it was a pity that I had not more time to break in the new boots gradually, but it was a clear case of

Hobson's choice, and there was nothing I could do about it.

Lieutenant-Colonel Wright was also present and he advised me, as a precaution, to destroy my passport and any other private papers I might have on me which could be of use to the enemy—'just to be on the safe side'. This I did, keeping only a little snapshot of my wife and daughter which I did not want to part with.

On returning to the first-aid post, I sent the cook back to Major Murray and kept only Corporal Tobin, the medical orderly, and Kokkinos. The first two were already provided with Red Cross armlets, and I put on my own and gave Kokkinos an extra one I had picked up in an abandoned camp. This was not strictly according to rules, perhaps, but it was only fair, as Kokkinos was unarmed and performing medical duties. The usual transport came round after dark and we sent all our wounded to Captain Gilbert; fortunately they were mostly sitting-cases that night. We next packed up most of our medical stores so as to be able to leave in a hurry as soon as we received our instructions from the A.D.M.S.

There was the customary lull in air activity after nightfall, but, on the other hand, ground rifle and machine-gun fire was much more sustained than on any previous night and could be heard much nearer. There was also a good deal of artillery activity on the part of the enemy, and I guessed that the Germans had brought up light, and perhaps heavy, mortars. On our side the heavy gun down by Suda Bay remained silent. Ships were still burning in Suda harbour and Canea was blazing fiercely, casting a deep red glare over the whole north-west sky. Taken all in all, I was certainly not feeling very happy about the general situation.

About midnight some soldiers—I think they were Royal Marines—turned up and asked us to lend them our stretchers as they wanted to bring us four badly wounded men who were lying in their camp. We had only three stretchers which I handed over with some misgivings. Perhaps I should not have done so, as the men never reappeared either to bring the wounded or to return our stretchers. I was particularly annoyed as I felt sure that we would urgently need stretchers now that we had been left without any.

An hour later half a dozen New Zealanders arrived with flesh-wounds that needed dressing; they brought with them an unconscious man whom they had picked up on the way. He had been wounded, probably by a hand-grenade, in the left breast and shoulder, and the left side of his face and jaw was just one mass of caked blood. Corporal Tobin and I cleaned him up as best we could; his left eye had been injured—we could not tell how badly—and, judging from the state of his wounds, he had probably been lying for some time without attention. He was in a high fever and looked as if he had eaten little or nothing for several days.

After patching up the other men also—their hurts were slight, but they were all much exhausted—I prepared some hot Oxo for us all and handed round some bully beef and biscuits, which was all we had left. It was astonishing to see the speed with which everybody wolfed it down. The first patient (I ascertained from his pay-book that he was Private Ironsides of the Royal Scottish) had recovered consciousness to some extent, and I was able to give him some Oxo and a couple of broken-up tablets of the German parachutists' 'Dextrosan', which seemed to do him a lot of good. While we were all eating, an incident occurred which rather betrayed the state of

our nerves. One of the New Zealanders dropped his mug with a crash on the table. Instantly we all of us threw ourselves flat on our faces on the floor, *including the man who had dropped the mug*! We had a laugh over it afterwards, but the laugh was not a very hearty one.

IV

The Retreat and the Evacuation from Crete

★

Wednesday the 28th dawned with the all-too-familiar air-attack at sunrise, but this time the infantry battle could be heard louder and nearer and there was much more artillery fire, many of the shells bursting in the groves around us. With the exception of Ironsides, I had only a few lightly wounded men, including some Greek soldiers, in the first-aid post. As the sound of the firing gradually crept closer, these patients slipped away one by one and took the road leading to Suda. I saw no point in retaining them.

As time went on, more and more weary and dishevelled men, some with rifles and some without, passed us hurrying towards Suda. Some of them shouted to us, 'You'd better clear out, the Jerries have broken through!' Several walking-wounded arrived also, but they preferred to go straight on rather than stop at our first-aid post. This seemed to me a particularly threatening sign, and I wondered if we too ought to join the eastward trek. But, as I had not received any orders from the A.D.M.S. or from Major Murray, I did not know if I was justified

in moving or not. Needless to say, there was no way of communicating with either of them as there was no field-telephone post anywhere in the vicinity, nor would I have known where to ring them up.

Towards 10.30 a.m., as the fighting could be heard ever closer, I decided to go and find Major Murray and receive instructions from him. I felt responsible for the safety of our little party, and knew that if we delayed much longer we would never get away at all. There was less air activity in our own particular neighbourhood just then and I was able to reach Captain Longridge's store hut without mishap. On my arrival I found that it had been abandoned to a crowd of civilians who were removing the tins and cases of supplies as fast as they could. I learnt from them that Major Murray and the other officers had left an hour or two earlier; Captain Longridge's camp in the ravine was also empty. The scene reminded me of our previous evacuation from Greece, and once again men and women milled round me, inquiring desperately if we were really retreating and what was to become of them when the German pigs arrived. I was not able to give them a satisfactory answer to either question, and they were soon on their way to the hills laden with as much of the stores as they could carry.

A visit to the naval first-aid post showed me that it too was deserted. I consequently decided that I had better evacuate our own first-aid post also, and, taking a stretcher from one of the tents, I returned up the hill towards Chikalaria.

Crowds of men were pouring down the road and I felt distinctly uncomfortable to be the only person going up, especially as I was told several times not to be a bloody fool as the Germans were already in Chikalaria. I felt tempted more than once to throw away the stretcher and

turn back, and I think that I would have done so had I been really certain that the enemy was in possession of the village. But I felt that I had to *know* before taking such a step or my conscience would always prick me for having left the others in the lurch. It was disturbing though to reflect that it might already be too late and that I was perhaps running into danger for nothing. My fears, fortunately, turned out to be premature.

The Germans had begun to lob over a few mortar shells every now and then; some of these fell near the road and I noticed that they exploded with a very low-lying burst, quite different from that of an aerial bomb. This was consistent with the fact that all the mortar-shell wounds I had attended to were rarely higher than the hip. A few planes were flying around, but they seemed to be engaged in setting fire to the brushwood a little higher up the hillside with incendiary bullets or bombs. I could not guess what they were after, unless it was a method of signalling that our men were in retreat and the line that they were taking.

Chikalaria had *not* yet been occupied, but the village appeared completely deserted as the inhabitants had either bolted themselves in their houses or fled up into the hills. There was only a fast-dwindling stream of soldiers, British and Greek, hurrying towards Suda.

The sounds of battle were now very close and an occasional stray bullet would whine over the low wall on the north side of the main street and slap into the houses across the way in a puff of brickdust and plaster. But if one kept one's head down, the wall gave ample protection. In one place one had an excellent view of the valley below. Geysers of flame and smoke from exploding bombs and mortar shells were erupting everywhere, the rattle of rifle and machine-gun fire was incessant and the scream

of swooping planes mingled with the general uproar. Now and then tiny figures appeared among the trees and others could be seen moving along Tobruk Avenue and the Canea main road; I guessed that they were Germans, but could not be certain owing to the distance and the drifting smoke. It was an absorbing spectacle, but I decided that I had better not waste too much time on it, as the small-arms fire was nearing the western end of Suda Bay and I was afraid that we might be cut off.

I reached our first-aid post, and we hastily put Ironsides on the stretcher I had brought, picked up the 'medical-companion', the satchel of shell-dressings, and a couple of water-bottles, and set off, Corporal Tobin and the medical orderly carrying one end of the stretcher and Kokkinos and I the other. We got along fairly quickly at first except when we had to stop and take cover from low-flying aircraft. We were kept cooped up for some time under a culvert on the outskirts of Suda by a machine-gunning plane, but, as far as I could see, it did no damage except to wound an Australian in the arm—a superficial injury which I dressed while waiting.

We were soon off again along the coastal main road leading due east from Suda. It was a congested mass of men—U.K., Australians, New Zealanders, and an occasional Greek—all hurrying eastwards; less than half of them had retained their arms and there was no attempt at military formation. I was surprised to note that no civilians had joined the exodus; they were apparently remaining put as they had been repeatedly instructed to do, or they were fleeing by the smaller mountain paths.

We were passed at short intervals by two cars and five or six lorries crammed with men; I tried to stop them to get Ironsides on board, but they dashed by without

paying any attention and I had to jump nimbly aside to avoid being run down. In the meanwhile the stretcher seemed to be getting heavier and heavier—Ironsides was rather a big man—and something went wrong with its front hinge so that the two handles kept on coming together. We were obliged to stop and repair this with some wire and, what with taking cover every now and then and having to rest from time to time, I saw that we were making very slow progress and that the sound of infantry fire was noticeably creeping up on us. I therefore told Corporal Tobin and the medical orderly to push on by themselves as, being Jews, it was uncertain what treatment they might receive if they fell into the hands of the Germans. I told Kokkinos that he could go too if he wished, although I thought that he and I would be fairly safe unless killed by mistake or by a chance bullet or bomb-splinter. Kokkinos, however, refused to leave me and so did the other two, a very plucky decision on their part under the circumstances. I had to *order* them to go, as I believed that they were running a graver risk than Ironsides, Kokkinos, or myself, and my responsibility was consequently greater as far as they were concerned. In the end they reluctantly left us after mutual handshakes and wishes of good luck, and we saw them disappear round a bend in the road. At my suggestion, Corporal Tobin took the 'medical-companion' and some spare bandages with him, leaving me the satchel of shell- and field-dressings and a few other first-aid necessities. It was rather a pang to part from the 'medical-companion', but it was too heavy for me to carry as well as the stretcher.

We were now about a mile and a half beyond Suda, our last view of the harbour being the poor old *Julia* and several other vessels still blazing redly. Kokkinos and I managed to stagger along with the stretcher for another

half-mile or so and then we were almost exhausted. We appealed many times for assistance from passing men, but nobody would stop until at last two Australians, Private Jarvis of the Australian Horse and another, whose name I have unfortunately forgotten, volunteered to lend a hand. Thanks to their help we covered the next half-mile in better time, and then a plane swept past, machine-gunning the road, and we had to take refuge in a nearby quarry. I took the opportunity to give Ironsides a couple of broken-up 'Dextrosan' tablets; he was unable to eat much at a time owing to his face wound and I had to keep up his strength by feeding him at frequent intervals. It was gratifying to note that he already showed amazing improvement; his temperature had almost returned to normal and his pulse was much steadier than when I had first examined him.

After the alarm was over, we found that the second Australian had left us and there were only three of us now to carry the stretcher. Then, to make matters worse, one of the handles snapped clean off, nearly pitching the patient out on to the ground. We discovered on examination that the wood had been hit at some time or other by a bullet or a bomb-splinter which had weakened it sufficiently for it to give way. This forced us to abandon the stretcher and take turns to carry Ironsides in a hand-chair, two carrying while the third had a rest. Ironsides was sufficiently conscious to be able to put his arms around the necks of his two carriers and not fall over backwards, but he was very heavy, and at the end of another half-mile we were all more or less on our last legs. At this juncture, as we sat panting by the side of the road, we saw a lorry filled with men—mostly wounded—approaching us. I signalled to the driver to stop; he seemed reluctant to do so, but, by great good luck, there was a middle-aged padre

on the driving-seat by the side of him. This padre, on seeing that we had a wounded man with us, at once ordered the driver to pull up and with his own hands helped us to get Ironsides on board. The lorry was already so obviously overloaded that we did not ask for a lift ourselves and, although there were many weary men all around who cast longing eyes on the vehicle, I must say that no attempt was made to rush it as I half-feared might happen. With a farewell wave from the padre, the lorry started up and soon disappeared down the road. It was a great relief to the three of us to feel that we had done all that was humanly possible for Ironsides; we were also pleased for our own sakes to know that we would not have to carry him any longer. A short distance further on Jarvis caught sight of some friends of his and preferred to join their party; so we wished each other good-bye and good luck and went our respective ways, our little band thus finally reduced to Kokkinos and myself.

Now that I had not got to think about Ironsides, I was able to pay more attention to what was going on around me. I knew that I was taking part in a retreat; in fact I wondered if it should not be called more correctly a rout as, on all sides, men were hurrying along in disorder. Most of them had thrown away their rifles and a number had even discarded their tunics, as it was a hot day with the sun beating down from a clear sky.

Nearly every yard of the road and of the ditches on either side was strewn with abandoned arms and accoutrements, blankets, gas-masks, packs, kit-bags, sun-helmets, cases and containers of all shapes and sizes, tinned provisions and boxes of cartridges and hand-grenades; now and then one ran across officers' valises and burst-open suitcases. It is curious how deep-rooted the instinct to rummage and 'scrounge' is. It was with difficulty that I

restrained myself from picking up a lot of useless articles, and it was only by reminding myself that every extra ounce would tell in the long run. I was greatly tempted to annex several brand-new silk khaki shirts from a discarded suitcase, but compromised by tearing them to ribbons so that no Nazi should swank in them—a childish gesture which gave me considerable satisfaction at the time. I was still obsessed with the idea of finding a pair of prismatic binoculars to be able to indulge in my favourite hobby of astronomy, but I did not see any during the whole retreat, though I must have met with almost everything I did *not* want. I had to content myself with useful but uninteresting things: a water-bottle, two blankets which I slung across my shoulder Russian fashion, a haversack, a piece of soap, a towel, and a cap-comforter. I counted on this latter and the blankets to save me from freezing during the night as I had done at 42nd Street. I also replenished my stock of medical necessities from an abandoned M.I. (medical inspection) tent, and finally Kokkinos and I each provided ourselves with a tin of bully beef, a tin of apricots, and two packets of biscuits as provisions for our march.

On our way I noticed that though the men around us were straggling along anyhow, they did not seem too depressed on the whole; many of them would crack an occasional joke or sit down at the side of the road for a quiet cigarette. As a matter of fact, it had not occurred to me that this was the first lap of a wholesale evacuation. I thought that we were only 'retiring to another defensive position prepared in advance' owing to a temporary reverse, and that long-range fighters would reach us somehow to enable us to clear the Germans out of the island. It certainly never entered my head that it was *we* who were being turned out!

We appeared by now to have outdistanced the infantry fighting, but air activity was again on the increase and every now and then the cry would go up: 'Here comes Jerry!' and we would all dive off the road as a hedge-hopping plane roared by with crackling machine-guns. But except for one man who was killed on the spot by a bullet through the brain, it did not seem to me that much actual damage was done, though the effect on morale was considerable.

These attacks soon became so frequent that I decided to abandon the road and keep parallel with it a few hundred yards up the hillside to the right where the going would be tougher but safer. I advised all the men near me to do the same, but only a few acted on my suggestion. The greater number, yielding apparently to a kind of herd instinct, insisted on sticking to the road. This placed me on the horns of a moral dilemma: Ought I, as a medical officer, to follow the same road as the majority and thus be on hand to treat any casualties, or ought I to go my own way and try to rejoin my unit as soon as possible? I finally decided on the latter course, though my choice may perhaps have been influenced by selfish considerations. Another moral problem which also presented itself was whether to hurry at once to the spot where a bomb fell to see if my services were needed, or whether to go only if somebody came to fetch me or if I heard cries for help. I arrived at the conclusion that the first course was impracticable as bombs were exploding everywhere all the time; once again selfish motives may have been partly responsible for my decision.

After leaving the road, Kokkinos and I skirted the mountain flank, now scrambling over rocks and through gullies and now following little winding goat-paths. The going was heavy, but at least we avoided the aircraft

which we saw every now and then machine-gunning the road below. We had also the advantage of cutting across a wide loop in the road and of meeting occasionally with little mountain springs where we could rest for a few minutes and refill our water-bottles. Neither of us felt much hunger, but we were continually tormented by a raging thirst, though we tried to drink as little as possible so as not to make marching more difficult.

The main road, which continued to run parallel with the shore, made a wide curve back to the south-east a couple of miles further on, and at this point the mountain slope became so steep that we were forced down on to the road again. A plane had passed by here a short time before, and had apparently been using incendiary bullets as the brushwood was on fire, and many of the wooden telegraph poles were blazing like torches. Some of these had been burnt through and had toppled over, snapping the telegraph wires. Field-telephone lines had also been strung on the same poles and they too were mostly broken. I wondered if the enemy had deliberately fired these telegraph-poles to interrupt communication or if it was just a chance occurrence. In any case, this incident would seem to prove that field-telephone lines should never, if possible, be supported on wooden telegraph-poles.

A short distance beyond this point the road forked, one branch continuing east along the coast and the other turning inland more or less to the south. We did not know which branch to follow as we had no inkling of our eventual destination; but as nearly everybody was taking the south road, we elected to take it also with the hope that, for once, the majority might be right. And, as things turned out, in this particular case it was. When we had gone some way, a staff car pulled up near us and a tall, red-tabbed figure emerged to scan the landscape through

a pair of field-glasses; I recognized that it was General Freyberg from portraits I had seen of him. After a few minutes the C.-in-C. returned to his car, which swiftly disappeared in the direction of Suda. Evidently General Freyberg believed in seeing things for himself every time. I admired his courage, though I did not envy him his drive in a conspicuous car along a Stuka-infested road. It must be wearing to be the chauffeur of a V.C.

Towards 3.30 p.m. we reached Stylos, a village of a few scattered houses, apparently all deserted, built on a low ridge beyond which the road began to descend slightly. Here a rough path ran between low walls of grey stone, and Kokkinos and I took it in pursuance of our usual policy of keeping off the main road as much as possible. Even then we had several times to dive into ditches or behind rocks to avoid ground-strafing aircraft.

There was a certain number of military camps dispersed among the olive groves in this area and here for the first time we saw units withdrawing in perfect order with their rifles and all their equipment. They were marching in sections, generally in single file owing to the terrain, under their officers and N.C.O.s, who ordered them when to scatter and take cover and when to re-form. It was very heartening to watch the calm and competent way they went about it.

Enemy air activity became more marked about this time, and suddenly we heard a loud droning from over the hills to the north-east. Then thirty or forty planes swept unexpectedly out of the skies and, after bombing the village we had just left, swooped roaring in our direction. At that moment Kokkinos and I were crossing an open field without any cover, but fortunately we saw an old disused limekiln a few yards away and tumbled into it just in the nick of time. The upper part of this kiln

had collapsed, but the bottom was some four feet below the surface of the ground and filled with a dense tangle of weeds and brambles, into which we burrowed and lay hidden. We were a hundred yards or so from the main road, and a small group of houses which the Germans, for some reason or other, began bombing and machine-gunning with great persistence although, as far as I could see, there was nothing to warrant such an expenditure of munitions.

For minute after minute, each one of which seemed an hour, that heart-stopping racket went on. Our refuge heaved and rocked and I was afraid that it would cave in on us; every now and then chunks of earth and stones spouting up from the explosions rattled on our steel helmets, and, although we were below ground level, the blast was so strong that it felt like a thump in the solar-plexus.

Every time I peeped up from beneath the brim of my tin hat, I saw one or more planes circling directly above us with the hateful black crosses standing out grimly against the lighter background of their wings. Even when I shut my eyes I could still sense their passage from the roar of their engines, the stutter of their machine-guns, and the high-pitched scream of their earthward dive. At such moments I remembered with apprehension the rumours that many German aircraft were provided with an extra machine-gun pointing vertically downwards, which fired automatic bursts at frequent intervals. I also wondered with even greater anxiety whether the enemy was actually trying to bomb our shelter under the mistaken impression that it contained a Bofors or a high-angle machine-gun. Of course reason insisted that the planes were aiming at the clump of houses by the road, and it was just our bad luck that we happened to be so

close to their target. This assurance, however, did not make the near-misses any the less terrifying.

Half an hour might have passed and still the attack continued as fresh planes arrived in relays. I felt as though my head would burst from the noise and the concussion, and I kept on muttering: 'I won't give up, damn you; I won't give up!' I had once read an article by Tom Winteringham advising one to repeat some such phrase to oneself in any difficult situation, and, childish though it may seem, this tip often proved very effective as far as I am concerned. Auto-suggestion no doubt had much to do with this gratifying result.

While all this was going on, I tried—as I have tried before and since—to analyse my sensations and to determine what fear actually is. In this I was unsuccessful. I feel sure, though, that the terror of death is only a secondary factor in the whole complex, and proof of this can be found in the many authenticated cases of people who have committed suicide rather than face their fear. For my own part the danger of being killed almost never occurred to me; I was far more terrified of being mangled, *painfully* mangled, than of being launched into Nothingness, or Eternity, or whatever awaits us after death. And the thought that I might lose my sight always haunted me like a dark cloud. It is more than probable, in my opinion, that the basic cause of fear is just a plain *physical* reaction of the organism without the intervention of any other process, whether mental or psychical. Nature has seen to it that, at the slightest hint of danger, the bloodstream is flooded with adrenalin and other fear-reaction hormones, with the object of galvanizing the body into action and getting it to remove itself as quickly as possible from the object of its apprehension. Nature could not guess that man would not only create new ways

of terrifying himself, but would also make it a point of honour to stay put and be scared out of the few wits he allegedly possesses.

Time seemed to have been petrified like one of its own fossils, but at last, after what seemed an age, the planes departed and we crept out dazedly into the open and resumed our march. Two or three of the houses which had just been strafed were on fire and sending up thick columns of smoke, there was a number of huge craters in and around the road and one smashed truck with its driver lying dead beneath it. That, as far as I could see, was the total result of all that late sound and fury.

Soon heads began to appear from all sorts of unexpected hiding-places, followed cautiously by their owners, and the southward retreat continued as before. Somebody else must have taken shelter in our limekiln at some previous time, as I found a tattered copy of one of the 'Saint' books lying in the brambles. I stuffed it into the breast of my battle-dress before leaving, but it dropped out later without my noticing it; this was a pity, as it was a story that I had not read before.

For the next hour or so we tramped along a low plateau covered with heath, ilex bushes, and wild thyme and sage, keeping always some five hundred yards to the right or left of the main road. There were stragglers everywhere, but now and then a formation would swing past in good order with its arms and equipment, generally in single file, more rarely two or three abreast.

After a while the road began to dip into a valley of olives, oaks, and other trees. At that moment a lorry caught up with us and the sergeant who was driving stopped and offered us a lift. This seemed like a miracle, as the few other vehicles we had met had never stopped even though we waved to them. They had always been

overcrowded too, while there was just room for two more in this lorry with a little squeezing. It was disappointing to learn that it was only going to a camp a mile or so further on, but even this was better than nothing. It felt almost like heaven to be able to rest a little, as my new unbroken-in boots had already chafed my feet rather badly in spite of the cardboard inner soles. We arrived at the camp all too soon, however, and once again Kokkinos and I had to continue our journey on foot. Enemy aircraft had already been this way, and had used incendiary bullets or bombs, as in many places the trees and brushwood were labyrinths of flame; some transport vehicles were still burning in one of the camps we passed.

Towards sunset we arrived at a camp on the bank of a stream beneath some magnificent plane trees. Several large lorries crammed with men were about to leave; one of these stopped for a moment and an officer, whose face was vaguely familiar, called to me by name to hurry up and jump in. As bad luck would have it, however, Kokkinos had just left me to fill the water-bottles and, by the time I had fetched him, the lorry was rushed by a milling crowd and had to depart in a hurry for fear of being swamped. The other vehicles had already vanished in the meanwhile and with them our last hope of a lift went glimmering.

As darkness was beginning to fall, we arrived at Neon Chorion, a large and still-inhabited village which looked almost undamaged. Here the road, which had gradually been curving towards the east, branched into two forks, the first continuing eastwards and the other turning to the south.

Crowds of men and many cars and transport vehicles, apparently from nearby camps, were arriving all the time, and several officers and military police were stationed at

the road junction to direct the traffic along the south fork. I asked one of the officers if he knew our destination, and he answered that we were all to report to a 'rest camp' two or three miles further down the road. Curious to say, belief in a mythical 'rest camp' had been widespread among all I had spoken to so far, and I wondered later if the officer who thus confirmed this rumour really believed in it himself or had orders to conceal the fact that an evacuation was planned. For my own part I still thought that we were merely retiring to another defensive line.

At that moment someone touched my elbow and I became aware of a white-bearded Greek priest who kept on repeating, 'English sick'. He was delighted to find that I could speak Greek and explained that three wounded British soldiers were lying, unattended, in front of his church. He led me to the spot; one of the men was dead and the other two were in a bad way. I bandaged their wounds, gave them a drink and a morphia injection, and wrapped them in one of my blankets. I tried to persuade the traffic-control officers to stop a vehicle to pick up the two wounded men. But I was told that owing to the obscurity, the narrowness of the street, and the speed of the traffic, any attempt to interfere with the latter might cause a serious accident or a jam and a long delay. I was advised instead to continue on to the 'rest camp', where there was a dressing-station, and have a motor ambulance sent back to bring in the two casualties. Before taking leave of the kindly priest, I asked him to keep an eye on the two patients and have them carried into one of the houses if I was delayed too long. This he promised to do and, after warm farewells, Kokkinos and I took to the road once more, thankful at last to be nearing our destination (as we thought!)

Complete darkness closed down in a very short time,

but it was a lovely night with the stars twinkling bright in the sky; we were thankful though that there was no moon to help enemy aircraft. The road at first sloped upwards fairly steeply and then grew more level. Olive trees could be vaguely discerned in the gloom, and now and then the ghostly shimmer of a whitewashed peasant hut. The road was congested with troops, some straggling in disorder, others in military formation. Men were resting along both sides of the way, the lighted tips of their cigarettes shining like rows of glowworms against the dark hedges. Now and then we would trip up over the extended legs of a sleeper lying in the ditch and hear a muttered curse or just a grunt or a snore.

We had already done more than two miles and still there was no sign of the famous 'rest camp'. We asked some of our fellow-hikers for information, but either they had never heard of the place or they thought that it was only a little further on. At first I was under the impression that we had merely been misled by the usual optimistic evaluation of marching distances with which we were already familiar; but after we had walked still another couple of miles without seeing the camp I began to suspect that something was wrong. I still believed that we were only withdrawing to a prepared position, but that position was apparently a good deal further back than I had expected. I might have been more suspicious if my thinking apparatus had been in proper working order, but my feet were so painful and I was so tired and thirsty—we had not come across any water for several hours—that I just tramped mechanically onwards like a robot and with a brain which was almost as blank.

The countryside was composed mostly of olive groves, orchards, cultivated patches, and vegetable gardens. There was no fruit, however, on any of the trees near the road;

either it was the wrong season—I could not recognize the trees in the darkness—or else they had been already stripped. Towards 10 p.m. we came at last to a well, but, owing to the crowd around it, we had to wait half an hour before we could get near enough to fill our water-bottles. I noticed, though, that there was very little shoving and pushing; everybody waited for his turn quite good-humouredly.

During the wait someone clapped me on the shoulder, and I saw Captain Urquhart and another officer of the 1,005th Dock Operating Company. It was pleasant to meet acquaintances and we marched along together; it was from them that I learnt definitely what I was dimly beginning to suspect: that this was not just a local withdrawal, but a wholesale evacuation. They added that our destination was Sphakia, a small village on the south coast of the island about forty miles by road from Suda. Captain Urquhart calculated that we still had another twenty-five miles to go; all this did not make very pleasant hearing.

We stuck to a programme of fifty minutes' walking and ten minutes' rest in each hour and made good progress. At first we tried a few marching songs, but we soon decided that it was better to save our breath, and trudged along in silence except during our rest intervals. At one place we were able to cut across a wide loop in the main road and, on topping a slight rise, we dimly saw in the darkness that the road was filled with a long line of vehicles palely silhouetted here and there by an obscured headlight. Soon afterwards broken ground forced us back into the road in front of this column, but the latter gradually caught up with us and forged slowly ahead. As it passed, I noticed that it consisted first of a certain number of motor-cars, followed by about a dozen motor-ambu-

lances. Next came thirty or more trucks and lorries of various sizes, including several huge 'matadors'. There were also a few Bren-carriers or light tanks, and finally two 'I' tanks brought up the rear of the column. There were several Bren-carriers at the head of the procession and, I think, an 'I' tank or two, but of this I am not certain. This was apparently almost all the armour we still had in Crete after being there six months!

For long minutes we found ourselves right in the midst of the clatter and clamour of this column, deafened by the noise and choked by the swirling dust which rose in the air. The vehicles were moving just a little faster than a walking-pace, so that we could not get in front of the line. But whenever we tried to lag behind, some sort of temporary jam occurred, the whole column would stop and, almost before we knew it, we were right in the middle of it again. This happened time after time, as if it were done on purpose for a practical joke, until we were half-frantic. Finally we had to sit down and take a longer rest than usual so as to allow the column to have a good start on us. Before this, I had to attend to a man who had become entangled with the traffic and received severe abrasions to his knee and thigh. I tried to get him aboard one of the ambulances while the column was at a standstill, but they all told me that they were already dangerously overloaded. In the end, however, I was able to squeeze him into a truck whose driver said that he could take just one more 'little 'un'—which the patient fortunately was.

We started walking again when we had let the column get well ahead. Shortly after midnight, we saw a curious reddish gleam in the sky ahead of us. At first we thought it was enemy aircraft dropping flares, then we took it for some kind of searchlight; finally, when we drew nearer,

we saw that it was the flames from several burning houses. A few minutes later we arrived at a fair-sized village (called, I believe, Vrisses) which had been blitzed by German bombers that afternoon. The place was apparently deserted, great holes gaped in the ground, several houses had been completely wrecked and many others badly damaged. Two houses at least were still burning furiously and great streamers of yellow flame were shooting up into the sky. One of them was a prosperous-looking little middle-class cottage, and I wondered who were the people who had loved it as home, and how many hopes and joys had gone up in flames with it just because Hitler and his submen had willed it so. Here, to our disgust, we again caught up with the column which had been delayed in picking its way through the rubble and debris which cluttered the village main street. We had another long halt to allow it to get well ahead; these rests were certainly very welcome to my feet.

After a while the road began to climb once more and to become very rough and stony. We overtook the column, which had got into difficulties at a sharp bend, and had to sit down under a big fig tree until it went forward again. The road grew steeper and stonier all the time, and I noticed that these stones had often been used to build rough mortarless walls on each side of the way.

In the early morning of Thursday, May the 29th, at about three o'clock, we were passed by half a dozen trucks belonging to an artillery unit, followed by three 'beetle-backed' tractors towing 25-pounder guns. The road was gradually getting steeper, but we plodded on for another half-hour until we became so exhausted that we were practically asleep on our feet; this decided us to have a short sleep of a few hours rather than knock ourselves up completely. We accordingly laid down my remaining

blanket and one that Kokkinos had also brought with him upon some growing oats beneath an olive tree and, crowding together for warmth as the dawn was quite chilly, we tucked ourselves up as best we could and fell asleep almost instantly.

In spite of all our good resolutions to be up again by sunrise, we were so dead-beat that the sun was already high in the heavens and it was nearly seven o'clock before we awoke, very stiff and cold. We had a hurried snack of bully beef and biscuits and, though I did not feel hungry, I forced myself to eat to keep up my strength. During the whole retreat I was often extremely thirsty, but never hungry; sometimes I felt that I would actually vomit if I tried to eat anything and sucked instead a tablet or two of the parachutists' 'Dextrosan'. In spite of this, I suffered more from my chafed feet than from weariness or from any other hardship. It was fortunate that long entomological excursions in civil life had accustomed me to tramping across difficult country, and that abstemious habits had kept me in fair training.

The road grew ever steeper. I knew, from what I remembered of the map of Crete, that we still had a stiff climb in front of us as, to reach the south shore of the island, we would have to go through a pass of the Aspra Vouna (White Mountains). After a few miles we reached a sort of wooded plateau where the road wound among olives and oaks. Here we saw the 25-pounder guns and their beetle-backed tractors concealed among the trees and undergrowth; I think that the 'I' tanks were with them too, but I cannot remember for certain. I guessed that they were remaining behind to cover the retreat.

After crossing this plateau, the road climbed above the olive-tree zone and the vegetation consisted mostly of ilex, lentisk, and brushwood. It wound for the most part

along the eastern slope of a precipitous gorge which penetrated deep into the mountain and twisted about like a maze. The scenery was remarkably beautiful, as some of the curves of the road allowed a view across the whole of the northern part of the island as far as the sea hanging like a blue curtain in the distance. On either side of us towered a jumble of steep and savage-looking mountains, some wooded, others bare and with patches of dazzling white snow on their craggy summits. These forbidding highlands are the home of the Cretan dittany, *Origanum dyctamnus,* from which is extracted an aromatic essence much used in perfumery and for flavouring certain liqueurs. This plant has the reputation, too, of being a potent aphrodisiac, hence its popular name of Erontas. It is extremely rare and some of the hardy mountaineers wrest a precarious living from Nature by searching for it among the perilous cliffs and precipices. The dittany's unpretentious purple blossoms have without doubt cost as many lives as its more famous rival, the Swiss edelweiss.

The road continued to unreel itself like an endless belt. Each time we topped a rise, we hoped that the real descent to the southern coast was at hand, but each time we saw a steeper slope just beyond. At times the road would go downwards for a short distance, but it would climb again a little further on. As the sun rose higher in the sky, the day grew hotter and hotter and with never a cooling spring or torrent among the bleak grey limestone ridges. The men around us were again throwing away their rifles and equipment, and the road was littered once more with abandoned weapons and supplies of all kinds. More ominous still, we began to meet with wrecked lorries. Some had apparently gone over the edge of the gully by accident during the night (there were three dead men around one of them), others had been bombed, had

broken down, or had run out of petrol and had been pushed into the ravine to clear the way for following traffic. I reflected what beautiful signposts they made to point out the line of retreat to enemy reconnaissance aircraft. On second thoughts I decided that it probably made no difference, as the Germans must have already guessed our destination.

Still, in spite of everything, I was rather surprised at the calm way nearly everybody was taking things. There was no unseemly hurry; many of the men were joking or sitting down for a quiet smoke or a satisfying meal of tinned salmon and pineapple. Everybody had plenty of food and cigarettes as they could—and did—help themselves to abandoned stores along the way. I found it hard to realize that I was taking part in what would probably be a historical event. It seemed somehow more like a crowd leaving a football match and finding that the trains were not running, than a retreat. The thought that really worried me was: 'How is this going to end?' I wondered if we would eventually be evacuated, or if our long march would all be for nothing and we would have to retrace the whole weary way as prisoners of war. I wondered too if the evacuation beaches would be a shambles, and if all that we had gone through already would be as nothing compared to what still awaited us. I did my best to put aside such reflections by reminding myself not to worry about crossing stiles before coming to them—but my imagination was uncomfortably active all the same.

During the morning we met a group of New Zealand soldiers who had two girls with them dressed in military uniforms and wearing steel helmets on their heads. They were both pretty and showed great pluck as they were trudging manfully along and laughing and joking with the soldiers in broken English. One of the New Zealan-

ders told me that they were Greek hospital nurses who had been taken aboard their ship during the evacuation from Greece, and who had remained with them ever since to help the sick and the wounded. They seemed very popular with all ranks, and I hope that they were able to get away from Crete safely.

So far we had not been molested by hostile aircraft, although we could see and hear them in the distance. Occasionally we heard bombing ahead of us or behind, and once we came upon the still smoking and blood-stained remnants of a lorry which had sustained a direct hit. From 10 a.m. onwards, however, enemy planes began to get really troublesome. Every now and then there would be the shout 'Take cover!' or 'Jerry up!' and everybody would leap off the road and fall face down among the rocks and bushes. But, although planes would roar along the ravine, machine-gunning as they went, no damage seemed to be done. As in Greece, it appeared to me that the Germans were not handling the means at their disposal very skilfully. Here was a narrow road, crowded and undefended, yet they did little to make this precarious line of retreat absolutely impassable. And, what was more, the mountain rose so steeply on one side of the way and fell so abruptly on the other that one had to keep to the road itself; it was not possible to proceed parallel to it and at some distance.

At about midday we had a short rest under some ilex saplings; my feet were red and swollen and very painful, but I was able to take off my boots and rest them for a while, although there was no water in which to bathe them. When we started again, I found that I could not keep up with the others; Captain Urquhart on his side could not be too long delayed as he was in charge of some thirty N.C.O.s and men of the 1,005th Dock Operating

Company. I lagged behind therefore with Kokkinos, who insisted staunchly on remaining with me, and who helped me to get along by giving me his shoulder to lean on occasionally. It was exasperating to think that I would have been perfectly all right if I had been wearing a properly fitting and broken-in pair of boots. Curious to say, it never occurred to me to try on the boots of any of the killed. This was not squeamishness, I just did not think of it at the time; another example of how the most obvious solution of a problem is sometimes overlooked. Fortunately we met an old shepherd guarding a small flock of scraggy mountain sheep; he gave me his crook, which had a curved handle on which I could lean, and thanks to which I made somewhat better progress.

Our meeting with the shepherd reminded Kokkinos of an amusing little story: A shepherd was once asked how he managed to count his flock so quickly. 'It's quite easy,' he explained. 'I just count their legs as they come out of the fold and then divide the total by four.' Another tale that Kokkinos also told me was very similar to the famous anecdote of the 'Isle of Wight calf'. A villager once came to Nasr' Eddin Hodja and asked for his advice. One of his cows had put its head into a *kioupi* (a large clay jar used for storing grain), and could not get it out. What was he to do? 'Very easy,' said Nasr' Eddin Hodja, 'just saw the cow's head off.' A little later the villager returned. 'Nasr' Eddin Hodja,' he complained, 'I followed your advice, but still I can't get the head out of the *kioupi*.' 'Well then', said Nasr' Eddin Hodja, 'try breaking the *kioupi*.'

A little later Kokkinos and I came to a shallow spring-fed water-hole where we were able to fill our water-bottles. The water was slightly muddy and contained many insect larvae (including *Culex*, *Chloeon*, and some

sort of dragon-fly, probably *Lestes*), but we were not particular, as it was the first water we had seen since the previous night.

At this point the road curved back on itself in a very long loop and one could save half a mile or more at the cost of a stiff climb of three or four hundred feet. I opted for this course, but, what with the heat of the day and my sore feet, I found it almost more than I could manage; even Kokkinos was pretty well exhausted. Much as we disliked doing so, we had to abandon our blankets and our haversacks with our toilet accessories and what remained of our provisions; the only things we stuck to were our steel helmets and our water-bottles. I also retained my satchel of first-aid necessities as, being a medical officer, I felt that jettisoning it would lose me my self-respect like the soldier who throws away his rifle. I still had plenty of medical stuff, although I had used up a fair amount of it as I went along, because I was able to replenish my stock from time to time from abandoned stores. At last, after a mighty effort, Kokkinos and I clambered back on to the main road at the upper loop. The final twenty or thirty yards of the climb was only a gentle slope, but I had to do it on all-fours as I was too spent to stand upright; I was able to get going again, however, after a short rest.

While I was still recuperating on a heap of stones, I was greeted enthusiastically by an elderly R.A.S.C. captain with the 'Pip, Squeak, and Wilfred' ribbons of the First World War on his breast. He boasted that he never forgot a face and claimed to recognize me as an old acquaintance. He seemed to take it for granted that I must also remember him, and I did not wish to hurt his feelings by confessing that this was not so. The next ten minutes were distinctly uncomfortable as far as I was con-

cerned, and I was already sweating under the collar and cursing my bad memory for faces, when a twist in the conversation made me suspect that we were talking at cross purposes. This became a certainty when 'the man who never forgot faces' dug me slyly in the ribs and asked me how many widows and orphans I had swindled lately with my bucket-shop business. It was annoying to discover that I had been straining my brain-cells for nothing, and my retort was sharper than the circumstances perhaps warranted, after which the gallant captain and I parted with some coolness. Some of the vagaries of human nature, when flung out of its accustomed orbit, are revealed by the fact that this little incident rankled in my mind for the next couple of hours to the exclusion of all else. The war and even my aching feet were relegated to second place and I caught myself repeating every now and then, 'Couldn't the fool see that I was a *doctor*!' I had to laugh at myself before the spell was finally broken.

By this time I judged that we had now reached an altitude of about 3,000 feet, as I could see a few stunted firs on the opposite slope of the ravine which showed that we were pretty high up. We had originally intended to rest for at least an hour before proceeding on our way, but, perhaps owing to some trick of the echoes, the distant firing that we could hear from time to time seemed suddenly to have grown much nearer. Rifle fire could also be heard from a new direction on our right and the rumour spread that the Germans had sent Bavarian mountain troops by a short path across the hills or had dropped paratroops to the south of us to cut us off. We consequently thought it more prudent to move on again after only twenty minutes. This was always a knotty problem with us: to decide how long we could rest and regain our strength without falling too far behind, especially as

nobody seemed to have the slightest idea of the enemy's whereabouts.

There was still a little water at the bottom of my bottle, which I had been carefully husbanding to refresh myself with at our next halting-place. I was eagerly looking forward to its grateful coolness, when I met a lance-corporal who asked me for a drink. I passed him my water-bottle and he promptly emptied it in a few gulps. This was the first time that such a thing had happened to me during the whole retreat, as there was an etiquette, rigidly adhered to, of never taking more than a couple of sips when drinking from someone else's bottle. It is a curious fact that I felt more surprised and insulted than injured, and it was with difficulty that I refrained from bringing down the empty water-bottle on the offender's head. Needless to say that my nerves were somewhat on edge at the time.

Towards 3.30 p.m. we fortunately came to another spring in a little hollow in the hills where we again filled our water-bottles; we then took to a narrow path up the side of the depression so as to cut off another bend of the main road. We were halfway up when the familiar cry of 'Take cover!' rang out, and a plane screamed down over the brow of the hill. There was a crowd of men around the spring which was situated right out in the open. They had no time to seek cover—running is the *worst* thing to do when a low-flying plane is overhead—so they just threw themselves down flat where they were. From our position that dense group looked very obvious and conspicuous, but apparently the plane did not spot them or else its aim was exceptionally bad, as it dropped a stick of bombs well away from the spring and on our side of the slope. The last bomb fell very near us, and a stone or splinter grazed Kokkinos's cheek, drawing blood and

narrowly missing his eye. Something, too—probably a stone—hit me a smart blow on the right ankle just above the top of my boot. I was almost afraid to look at first, but when I did I found, rather to my surprise, that there was only a slight swelling which changed later on into a nasty bruise, although I immediately massaged the spot with a little vaseline. This was annoying, as it made walking still more painful—almost as if the thing had been done on purpose.

Men were sheltering among the rocks all around us, and I noticed that there were no more curses against the German planes or gibes at the R.A.F. as I had so often heard during the first few days of the battle. Everybody had begun to look upon the Luftwaffe as one of those cataclysms of Nature, like the thunderbolt or the tornado, which just have to be accepted as another of the evils of this imperfect world. I had rather fallen into this frame of mind myself; half taking it for granted that one enemy plane at least should be circling above our heads and hailing it as an unexpected boon of Providence if, for half an hour, the skies should happen to be empty.

After a bit of a climb, we at last struck the main road again, and this time, to our delight, we saw that it dipped towards a break in the hills a few miles to the south and that there were no other mountains beyond this pass. At long last we had reached the culminating point of our weary march! At that moment we again had to take cover as five planes in V formation roared overhead and a few minutes later we heard the road behind us being vigorously bombed and machine-gunned.

During this alert an empty lorry pulled up near us under a tree by the side of the road. It was going in the direction from which we had come and its driver told us that our destination was Imbros, a village four or five

miles further on. He added that all vehicles arriving there unloaded and then performed a kind of shuttle service. They would return ten or twelve miles up the road, pick up as many men as possible, especially the wounded, bring them to Imbros and then go back for another lot. Only a very limited amount of transport, however, could be assigned to this important task as many vehicles had been lost on the road, as we had already seen for ourselves. The drivers did magnificent work in my opinion, as it must have been an exacting and arduous experience to proceed along that rough and congested track in the face of enemy bombs and machine-gun bullets. We had passed vehicles on this shuttle service several times in the last hour or so, but never at the *right* moment; only when they were going out or when they were returning already so full as to be practically bulging out at the sides.

On the left-hand side the ground now dropped abruptly to a beautiful little valley, all green with fields and trees, but the road itself continued straight on, passing through a small, deserted-looking village known as Sinikismos Petres. At this point the hurrying crowd was dividing into two streams; a small proportion had chosen a steep path which wound down into the valley, but the great majority still surged automatically along the main road. With my usual prejudice against keeping to the roads, I decided to take the descending path; this meant a climb at the other end to regain the main road, but I thought, on the whole, that it would be worth it. Another reason for my decision was the sight of what looked like a water-mill in the depression below us and the consequent probability of finding water.

Kokkinos and I soon reached the valley (known, I believe, as Askifou); it was a lovely and peaceful place with lush meadows and cultivated fields, dotted here and

there with little farmhouses all of which were now deserted. The place was well wooded with plane, walnut, and fruit trees, the ground was carpeted with wild flowers, birds were singing among the bushes, and one felt that surely war could not come to such an idyllic spot. It could and did, however, and every now and then we had to take cover as enemy aircraft, generally in flights of five or nine, materialized suddenly overhead. The main road and the little village we had previously noticed were repeatedly bombed (the Luftwaffe even went out of its way to shoot up a derelict and dilapidated farm tractor), but most of the planes flew on to the south, where we could hear very heavy bombing beyond the skyline. The road had also been blitzed some time before and we could see the wrecks, one of them still smoking, of several large lorries.

We reached our objective and found it to be not a water-mill, but some sort of silo or other agricultural building. There were several wells, though, and a running spring in the vicinity and we were able to indulge in a delicious and satisfying drink, fill our water-bottles and sit down for a much-needed rest. I gave my feet a cool soak in a nearby ditch and treated them with acriflavine, which did them a lot of good.

There were two very young British officers recuperating in the shade of a small clump of trees, and we had a bit of a chat while they shaved. It rather amused me that anybody should bother to shave during a retreat, but I thought that it showed the right spirit. Their example was contagious, and Kokkinos and I both went to the length of borrowing their soap and washing our hands and faces.

After resting for about twenty minutes, we took leave of our new friends and resumed our trek to the south. A

number of troops were going the same way as ourselves, and I noticed that a good proportion of them were fully armed and equipped, and marching in military formation under their officers and N.C.O.s. There were also many stragglers who were still throwing away their arms, and the rough track sloping up to the main road was littered with rifles, cast-off webbing, and scattered cartridges. During the latter part of our march we met a few Greek officers and soldiers and some British and Greek naval officers and ratings. Some of these were merchant-marine personnel from the ships sunk in Suda Bay, and among the latter I recognized the first mate of the old *Julia*. At the southern end of the valley was a tiny rustic church, outside which I noticed a couple of Bren-carriers concealed beneath some overhanging trees. The contrast between these shrines dedicated to such opposite deities was particularly striking.

Near the upper end of the path we came upon Captain Urquhart and his party. He told me that they had lost some time by taking a 'short cut' which had led them over some very difficult and broken ground, thus allowing us to catch up with them. He gave Kokkinos and me a piece of bully beef and a couple of biscuits each. I was not yet at all hungry, but I ate as before, as I knew that it was necessary to keep up my strength. I was pleased to learn from Captain Urquhart that Imbros, where G.H.Q. had been established and where we had to report, was now only a mile away. We had walked nearly forty from Suda over mountainous country in less than thirty hours in spite of all interruptions; not too bad a performance considering the circumstances.

As we emerged on to the main road, I saw a sight which spoke well for the fighting spirit of the Cretans and their will to resist. It was an old grey-bearded Cretan peasant

riding a wiry little pony and carrying across the front of his saddle an old, but beautifully cleaned and oiled Martini-Henry single-shot rifle; two bandoliers full of cartridges crossed his chest. I asked him where he was going and he answered coldly: 'I'm going to get one of those German pigs, even if it's the last thing I'll ever do.' I told him, that, if he went down the path I had just come from, he could throw away his old rifle and pick up as many modern rifles as he liked which would be more suitable for the job. He was at once all eagerness and clamoured for further information, because, as he said, he knew several friends of his who were 'longing to get hold of a good rifle and would know how to use it'. When I last saw him, he was hurrying down the path to salvage some of the abandoned rifles.

This old Cretan was typical of the guerrilla fighters who had so often in the past been the terror of all invaders, and who were later to give such a good account of themselves during the Italo-German occupation of the island.

He reminded me of another old Cretan I had met during the First World War, Cymon Petrakis I think his name was, who had volunteered as a gunner, at the age of fifty-four, in the K1 Field Artillery Brigade of 'Venizelos's Army'. Petrakis, on being asked his profession in civil life, blandly replied, 'Brigand', and it was plain that to him this was a perfectly legitimate and honourable career. I subsequently inquired of Petrakis if the dividing line between 'brigand' and 'thief' was not apt to prove somewhat illusive at times, but he would not have it so. In fact he was considerably hurt at the suggestion and offered, in the tone of one who speaks to a rather backward child, to give me a clear example of the difference.

'Now suppose', he said, 'that I saw a man drop his

pocket-book and continue on his way without noticing his loss. If I were a *thief* I would keep that pocket-book, but being a *brigand* I would return it to its owner. Then I would take a short cut, meet him on the road face to face and demand that pocket-book from him again.' 'But doesn't the unfortunate owner still lose his pocket-book?' I pointed out. 'Not if he's man enough to defend it!' shouted Petrakis, triumphantly clinching his argument. '*Now* do you see the difference? I give him a chance to defend his pocket-book and if the can't defend it, well, then he ought to hand it over to somebody who can.' It was certainly a simple and clear-cut philosophy, and who knows if Petrakis may not have left a son or a grandson to practise it on the German invaders, who, of course, would never return a pocket-book under *any* circumstances.

After rejoining the main road, a little more walking brought us in sight of Imbros, which we reached at about 7 p.m. It was a fairly large village in a tiny plain hemmed in by mountains, and situated at the upper end of a deep gorge which ran down south to the sea. The whole region was very stony, all the houses were built of stone, and the fields were divided into little square plots by low stone walls. A few cypresses and fig trees were scattered here and there in the valley and olive groves covered the surrounding slopes. This village was now General Freyberg's G.H.Q., and it was from here that the evacuation was being organized.

On our arrival, I reported to the Senior Medical Officer and received orders to report, together with Kokkinos, to Major Cowen, of the New Zealand Medical Corps, who was to be found in a gully about a mile further down the gorge. On my way through the village, I met Captain Fenn who told me that Major Pitcairn, Captain Long-

ridge, Lieutenant Mikelides, and most of the other officers of the various Cypriot units, had also reached Imbros together with a good proportion of their men. He was unable, however, to give me any news of Major Murray.

In accordance with my instructions, I continued along the main road with the mountain on my right and a wide and precipitous ravine on my left until I came to a wooded gully running down from the hills. The road spanned this gully on a stone culvert, beneath which Major Cowen had established his headquarters, his staff consisting of himself, three other medical officers (whose names I forget), and several N.C.O.s and men of the Australian and New Zealand Medical Corps. Our job was to receive all the wounded—walking or conveyed—who came down the road, collect them in the gully under cover of the trees, give them every possible medical care, and have them transferred by lorry to Sphakia on the south coast of the island. This village was six or seven miles distant, and it was from there that the evacuation was scheduled to take place. This operation would be continued during three successive nights—or four if possible—and the first batch of men were to be taken off that very night (May the 29/30th), priority being given to the wounded.

The work was already under way. A large number of wounded had accumulated during the day, and these were put into lorries which carried them down the hill, as far as the road was passable, and then returned for more. Kokkinos and I helped as much as we could, but we were both more than half out on our feet. Major Cowen noticed this and very kindly told us to have 'forty winks', adding that he would call us when we were needed. We required no second bidding, but just lay down on the ground behind the culvert and were in-

stantly asleep. During the night I vaguely heard some explosions, but the sounds were not loud enough to rouse me; I learnt subsequently that the next gully, a little to the south of ours, had been heavily bombed.

Soon after dawn on Friday, the 30th of May, I awoke and heard Major Cowen calling me from his H.Q. under the culvert. He invited Kokkinos and me to come in and have breakfast; this consisted of bully beef and biscuits washed down by ultra-strong tea which an Australian medical orderly had brewed in a petrol-tin over a primus stove. My appetite was somewhat better as the rest had done me a lot of good, and I was able to tackle the meal with rather more interest than usual. During breakfast one of the orderlies tripped over somebody's feet and upset the petrol-tin of boiling tea over my right leg. Luckily most of the tea had already been drunk, but there was enough still left to give me an extensive scald, even through my thick battle-dress trousers. It was particularly infuriating the way everything seemed to be trying to damage my lower extremities!

Major Cowen warned Kokkinos and me not to leave the shelter of the culvert, except when on duty, as he did not want to attract the attention of reconnaissance aircraft which frequently appeared overhead and sometimes machine-gunned the road at this point. This we soon observed for ourselves, as every now and then a plane would roar past, spraying the ground with machine-gun bullets, but doing no damage as far as I could see—except perhaps to our nervous systems.

I learnt from Major Cowen that the first night's evacuation had been fairly successful, and that five or six thousand men had been taken off from the Sphakia beaches. Another batch would be evacuated this night (May 30/31st) and one more the next (May 31st/June

1st; it was problematical, however, if more could be saved as, even if the Germans could still be held in check, the waxing moon would make the operation too hazardous. It would be first quarter on June the 2nd, and there would then be enough moonlight for the ships to be in considerable danger from enemy dive-bombers. The only road to Sphakia was the one which passed through our gorge; it was guarded at intervals by armed pickets to prevent any attempt to rush the evacuation beaches, and nobody was allowed to get by without an official pass.

All that morning wounded men were brought to us or would stagger in by themselves; after receiving first-aid they were carried to the gully to await nightfall when they could be sent down by motor-transport. The lightly injured, who were not too exhausted to walk, were told to go on singly—so as not to attract the attention of enemy planes—to another first-aid post at the foot of the hill, where they would receive further instructions. From time to time we heard distant gun and small-arms fire to the north and, as the sound gradually drew nearer and seemed to extend to the north-west, we wondered how the line was holding and how long it would still be able to hold. Occasionally we also heard detonations, like stray rifle-shots, to the south, and the rumour spread that para-troops had been dropped further down the gorge and were trying to cut us off. Another rumour had it that the pickets were dealing with stragglers who were attempting to slip down to the beaches without permits. This might have been true, because now and then I had noticed prowlers sidling by at the bottom of the ravine or high up on the slope opposite, and guessed from their furtive movements that they had no business to be there. Another possible explanation was that ammunition was being

destroyed to prevent its falling into the hands of the enemy.

Towards midday Major Cowen received orders to evacuate all the walking wounded without waiting for nightfall; they were to be sent down, with the minimum delay possible, in lorries bearing large Red Cross flags. This had been tried on a small scale the previous evening, but some of the vehicles had been attacked with a number of casualties in killed and wounded (or rather *re*-wounded). It was thought, however, that the German planes might not have seen the Red Cross flags owing to the late hour, and it had been decided this time to make the start when there was still plenty of light. Major Cowen therefore arranged that one of his medical officers, a captain in the Australian (or New Zealand) Medical Corps, and I would take charge of a batch of some one hundred and fifty walking wounded who were to be evacuated that same night. He himself and the other medical officer would remain behind until the following day.

The wounded began leaving from 3.30 p.m. and Kokkinos and I climbed aboard the last vehicle at about five o'clock. I was sorry to say good-bye to Major Cowen, for whom I already felt a very warm regard, but in my heart I welcomed the chance of an early departure from Crete, as the sounds of battle were creeping ever nearer in a very disconcerting manner. Before mounting the lorries, we all received strict orders to discard everything that might remotely resemble a weapon and *even to throw away our steel helmets*! I must say that I felt very naked and unprotected without the tin hat which I had almost slept in for so long, and I could see that the others were of the same way of thinking. The lorry, a small one, was so crowded that Kokkinos and I, together with three

others, had to sit on the tailboard which was supported on either side by chains. I remember wondering what would happen if a weak link gave way under the strain, and my heart was in my mouth each time we jolted over a stone or any other obstacle.

The road wound steeply down the hill with many curves and hairpin bends; the scenery was savage and magnificent with the gorge on our left and the steep mountainside on our right. The latter was well wooded with conifers; I had no time to ascertain the species, but it was probably the Aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*), a common tree in the Eastern Mediterranean basin. As we descended towards the sea, the going, which had not been too bad so far, grew steadily worse, and soon we reached a point beyond which the road had been only partially completed. We also met with many more wrecked and burnt-out vehicles, some tumbled into the ravine, others still upon the wayside, and it was often a difficult feat to squeeze past them. Among these was a large white motor-ambulance with huge Red Crosses plainly marked on its roof and sides. It had been wrecked by machine-gun fire from the air and was riddled and splintered from end to end; I wondered what had been the fate of its helpless occupants. We ourselves had a large white sheet, with a cross of red cloth roughly stitched to it, over the bonnet of our lorry. An R.A.M.C. corporal was seated on the cab with a home-made Red Cross flag fixed to a long pole which he waved about vigorously whenever a plane appeared in the distance. So far, however, no aircraft had come near us, although we could see them bombing targets somewhere ahead.

At last, three or four miles from our starting-point, we came to a spot where three burnt-out vehicles lay across the road, blocking it completely as there was the moun-

tain on one side and a very steep drop on the other. I noticed that they had been shot up by what must have been the concentrated fire of several aircraft. They were liberally splashed with blood, and two dead men lay by the side of them.

When we got off the lorry, we were accosted by a R.A.M.C. sergeant, who told us that our orders were to join another party of forty or fifty men from some of the preceding vehicles who were waiting a little further along the road. We were all to make our way down the hillside as best and as quickly as we could and a guide would meet us near the bottom with further instructions and lead us to the beach where the embarkation was to take place. We accordingly joined the other group, under the Australian medical officer who had left just before us, and started down the road with them towards the sea which gleamed in the distance far below.

The road had reached the end of a rocky spur after crossing a small bridge and the mountain now sloped abruptly downwards on our right. To the south the stony, brushwood-covered, and almost treeless hillside fell away to the coast, and between the latter and the mountain base lay a mile-wide irregular plain intersected by numerous gullies. Far away in the distance glinted a sun-lit expanse of blue, which we all scanned eagerly, without, however, observing any signs of shipping. To the west and close by the shore a few of Sphakia's houses stood out wanly against the grey-green olive groves, while the mountain range we had so recently surmounted loomed parallel to the sea, like a dark cloud within which low mutterings of man-made thunder could occasionally be heard.

On joining the others, we had been told by the Australian medical officer that there were strict orders *not* to

scatter or take cover if aircraft should appear; we were not even to throw ourselves flat on the ground. We were instead to bunch together and keep slowly moving forward while the R.A.M.C. corporal waved the Red Cross flag from side to side to spread it open and make it more visible from the air.

Our little band must have presented a sorry spectacle as it limped down the road; we had to proceed very slowly as some of the patients were scarcely in a condition to walk at all. Everyone helped as much as possible, the stronger supporting the weaker, while the medical staff, including Kokkinos and myself, did their best to be in at least three places at once.

The road suddenly came to a dead end a few hundred yards further on and we had to scramble down the hillside by rough goat-paths; we were then still about two miles from Sphakia as the crow flies. The way was steep and stony, and soon my already ill-treated feet were in such a state that I was no longer able to help anyone else; even with my stick it was all I could do to hobble along myself. But Kokkinos rose nobly to the occasion; he allowed me to lean on his shoulder on one side while he helped along one of the wounded on his other arm. Even then, I do not know if I could have kept up for very long were it not for the fact that there were others in far worse straits than myself, which made it necessary for the whole party to stop every now and then to give everybody a rest.

So far we had seen comparatively few aircraft, but they had left proof of their recent activities in the dust and fumes still shrouding some of the gullies and the smoke-wreaths drifting skywards over the houses of Sphakia. Then suddenly we heard the same old hateful roar in the heavens and saw a flight of fifteen planes making straight for us, followed at some distance by another fifteen. As

they approached they opened fire with their machine-guns, but, as it seemed to me, in rather a half-hearted and inquiring manner as if they had noticed something odd in the general appearance of our party. In any case none of the bullets took effect or even came near us, as far as I could tell. We bunched together as we had been ordered, but I must confess that it was perhaps the nastiest moment of my life. I had to resist the instinct to throw myself flat behind the nearest cover, and I could see that most of the others felt exactly the same. I think it was the fact that most of the patients were too dazed and exhausted to care much what happened that really kept our little band together, and many of them were too weak to go in for acrobatics anyway. A few of our number did leap into the bushes, but not enough to signify; as for the R.A.M.C. corporal, he manfully stood his ground and waved his flag for all he was worth.

And, to my great surprise, it worked! The oncoming planes ceased firing and circled once or twice low down over our heads; several of them even dipped their wings as they passed to signal that they had seen and understood our flag. Then they swept on while the second flight roared up and acted in the same way. I will give the devil his due and say that in this particular instance the Germans *did* respect the Red Cross. And, what is more, for the rest of that afternoon until nightfall aircraft—sometimes singly, but generally in flights of five to fifteen—kept swooping down on us, but they always stopped firing as soon as they were near enough to see our flag. As before, they circled us at a low altitude and in many cases dipped their wings. They almost scared us to death, but they did not otherwise harm us, though I felt more than a trifle limp after each of their visits. I do not know how to explain this rather surprising conduct on the part of

the Germans. In Greece they had bombed hospital ships and trains without any compunction, and the evening before, according to report, they had attacked parties of walking wounded and caused a number of casualties, yet this time they merely circled us and departed without harming a hair of our heads. Did we just chance upon an unusually decent lot of Germans, or were they short of bombs and bullets at the time and did not think it worth while to waste them on such a miserable target? Another theory advanced was that the Germans purposely refrained from attacking all the retreating troops so as to have a chance of bombing the ships which would be sent to evacuate them. I hope, however, for the good name of mankind as a whole, that the above incident was due to the fact that there were still some Germans in whom all humane feelings had not been entirely obliterated.

Throughout the afternoon successive flights of aircraft, including those which circled us in passing, swept down into the plain and began a tremendous pounding of the gullies beneath us and of the village of Sphakia. I could not understand what they were bombing so industriously as, from where we were, I could not distinguish any troop movements or any observable military objectives. Yet relays of planes kept up their attacks until nightfall.

From our position up the hillside the sight was both horrific and absorbing, as the aircraft were little higher than our own altitude. Many of the planes were high-level bombers, but a great number of Stukas were also present, and it was breath-taking to watch them plunging down almost vertically until one thought that they were about to dive into the ground. At the last possible moment they would flatten out and zoom upwards at a sharp angle and a few seconds later the landscape below was blotted out by flame, smoke, and dust.

Most of the planes were dropping their bombs among the gullies in salvoes of three, a large bomb in the centre and a smaller one on each side; but some were also launching salvoes of five, a large bomb in the centre and four smaller ones round it. I thought at the time that this was an optical illusion, but I learnt subsequently that the Stuka sometimes carries five bombs, one of 500 and four of 50 kilogrammes. It was strange how distinctly one could see the oval black specks as they detached themselves from the undercarriage, and one could follow them for some distance before their speed became too great. Then would come a yellow-white flash and a huge cloud of smoke and dust which leapt upwards and spread out sideways along the ground. A few seconds later (I forgot to count how many) the shattering roar of the explosion would reach us, accompanied by a blast wave that hit us in the diaphragm with a physical blow. Sphakia too was ruthlessly attacked, and bombs were continually bursting among the houses in upflung clouds of brickdust and smoke as relays of aircraft succeeded each other in never-ending waves. It was some of these planes which occasionally swooped down on us, and our standard-bearer would then wave his flag frantically, looking for all the world as if he was trying to shoo away a swarm of gigantic wasps with a fly-swatter.

During all this time we were gradually moving down the boulder-strewn hillside, with frequent halts for rest and repairs. We sometimes met stragglers cowering from the planes behind rocks and bushes, and these would be flabbergasted to see us walking so blithely in the open. Some of them would shout: 'Take cover, you fools, can't you see the Jerries!' but a few threw away their steel helmets and tried to slip into our party, one man even tying a field-dressing around a perfectly uninjured forehead.

Strictly speaking, it was no doubt my duty to dismiss these men, especially the pseudo-casualty, but I had not the heart to do so. I reflected that they might be good soldiers who had been through hell before thus disgracing themselves, and I wondered how I myself might behave if I reached the breaking-point of my morale. The responsibility was mine as the other medical officer was at the head of the column and could not see what was happening, so I decided—rightly or wrongly—to take preventive measures only if we were joined by too many unauthorized persons. The wounded, however, took a hand in the matter themselves, either because they thought that if our band became too numerous it would invite air attack, or because they feared that the evacuation ships might not be able to provide accommodation for all. Whatever may have been the reason, they raised such a commotion when the second or third would-be travelling-companion tried to join us that the unfortunate fellows slunk off. I really think that they would have been lynched if they had not done so. This was still another example—or rather two examples in one—of the fact (which I had already noticed during the First World War) that, contrary to what some might affirm, war does *not* bring out the nobler side of one's character. It may do so perhaps in the case of a few exceptional individuals, but in the great majority of men it is the primitive instincts which gain the upper hand. And primitive instincts are rarely noble.

After many efforts we reached the foot of the hill at long last and joined another group of wounded, bringing our numbers up to between 120 and 140. Here we were met by our guide, a R.A.M.C. sergeant, who told us that our way led through a deep gorge, the Sphakiano Pharangi, which lay between us and Sphakia. This ravine

was still being bombed and, as it was shrouded in a thick fog of smoke and dust, the enemy planes would not be able to distinguish our Red Cross flag if we were to leave at once. Orders were consequently given for everyone to sit down on the ground in the open and to keep as still as possible, with our flag-wagger in our midst to wave away any aircraft that might come too near.

We all sat or lay down in a compact bunch, thankful to rest our aching limbs after our gruelling descent. Around us stretched a little uneven plateau with the mountain we had scrambled down behind us and the ravine we had still to cross in front. To our left rose a limestone cliff honeycombed with numerous caves, which would have been very inviting if our orders had not been to stay where we were. I noticed that a number of troops were sheltering in these caves, but the distance was too great for me to see who they were.

While we were waiting, a strange uneven roar and rattle suddenly made itself heard behind us, and, looking up the hillside, I saw a lorry coming down the steep slope in a series of huge leaps and bounds. It bounced each time in a flurry of dust and flying fragments and rolled and tumbled in a most extraordinary manner until it fetched up against some rocks in an avalanche of earth and stones. I guessed that this spectacle, in spite of its Hollywood atmosphere, was merely due to a broken-down vehicle being pushed into the ravine to clear the road for following traffic. The wounded greeted the whole performance with distinct approval and were shaken out of their usual apathy for a few minutes. Feeble cheers were raised whenever the lorry made any super-prodigious leap and many a precious cigarette changed hands in bets on the length or direction of the next bound.

As the moon was almost in its first quarter and we were

not far from the longest day of the year, it had been decided that it would not be dark enough to leave for the evacuation beaches before 8.45 p.m. We had arrived at our present halting-place at about 7.30 p.m., and it seemed as if the time for departure would never arrive, in spite of the fact that I had plenty of work to do in looking after the patients and changing the dressings of some who badly needed it. Kokkinos and one of the medical orderlies went with the guide to a nearby well to refill all the water-bottles and everybody was thus able to have a much-needed drink. Enemy aircraft did not come near us much during this period; when they did, the R.A.M.C. corporal shooed them off with his flag and they went like lambs.

At last it was twilight and aerial activity ceased according to custom. The order to start was given and a goat-path led us down into the ravine, which was obscured by a faint smoke-mist still reeking of high explosive. We scrambled up the other side, crossed an uneven ridge, and dipped again into a stony, low-lying depression whose appearance in the half-light suggested the bed of a dried-up torrent. The place was overgrown with bushes, mostly oleanders and *Vitex Agnus-castus*, and I think, too, that we passed some vineyards, but it was getting too dark to see clearly. We stumbled along an almost non-existent track, dodging around bushes and boulders, and roughly following the line of some white limestone slopes which glimmered wanly on our right. We were following the guide in single file, Kokkinos and I bringing up the rear, and every now and then part of the line would lose contact in the darkness or the vanguard would move forward too quickly for some of the wounded to keep up. Then we would all have to whistle and shout to each other so as to keep in touch until we managed to reassemble again.

Occasionally the strength of one of the patients would give out completely and then every able or semi-able-bodied man had to help carry him in turn in a hand-chair until he had recovered somewhat. I was in such a bad way by then that, even with the best will in the world, I was unable to render much assistance as my feet were badly swollen and I could scarcely walk. But the other medical officer and Kokkinos performed wonders, and so did all who were in a condition to do so.

We arrived finally on the outskirts of Sphakia, and here, on the edge of a little olive grove, we were halted opposite an opening in a rough stone wall just outside the village. The night was fine and the sky was full of stars, among which I observed red Antares of Scorpio shining in the south. It was pitch-dark by then, except for the faint light of the setting crescent moon, and I could just see long rows of men assembled on either side of the path; I guessed that these were troops waiting for the start of the night's evacuation. I heard someone give a low command and recognized the voice of one of the sergeants of the 1,005th Cyprus Pioneer Company. I accosted him and was very pleased to learn that Captain Longridge was safe, and that he was somewhere in the neighbourhood in charge of a formation of Cypriot Pioneers; he did not know, however, if Captain Fenn or any of the other officers had left Imbros. From what he told me, I understood that this time the Cypriots had been given a good place on the priority list for embarkation. This was only fair as they had been among the last on the list during the evacuation of Greece, with the result that only a minority of them had escaped from that country.

At that moment a small group of officers came forward, and I was pleased to see that they were *naval* officers!

One of them gave us a short talk, instructing us what to do and stressing the need for calm and quiet. He pointed out that enemy aircraft might come over and drop flares; if this happened, everybody was to keep absolutely still and not to fall flat or to seek cover, 'Your own lives and the lives of your comrades depend upon it!' He explained that, even with a bright flare, a plane has great difficulty in recognizing what is going on on the ground unless it sees *movement*. For obvious reasons, smoking or the striking of matches was also rigorously forbidden. The officer went on to say that we were to march down to a beach below Sphakia from which we would be taken in invasion-barges to the waiting ships; the wounded and their attendants would be given priority and were to move forward first.

I noticed that the quiet and businesslike manner in which this naval officer spoke seemed to brace everybody up and give them renewed confidence. It certainly had that effect on me and I heard people repeating over and over again, 'Thank God for the Navy!' as if we were already saved. A few minutes later we started off again, preceded by a dozen or more stretchers carrying some of the more seriously wounded.

We passed through the opening in the wall, but I was disappointed not to see the embarkation beach beyond it as I had hoped. In fact the latter was still some distance off, as we would have to go right through the village and down a low hill to reach a little tree-shaded cove south-west of Sphakia. It was an eerie experience as we groped our way along the streets of that murdered and deserted village, skirting huge bomb craters or clambering over masses of rubble and smashed brickwork. Every now and then the men in front would come to a sudden halt, and then the whole column would stand stock-still for several

long minutes before gradually moving on again. Now that deliverance seemed so near, everybody's nerves were on edge; people were cursing and swearing at each other at the slightest provocation in venomous whispers. I wondered—and others no doubt were thinking along the same lines—if something would not happen at the very last moment to prevent our getting away. I wondered too if enemy planes might not suddenly pounce down on us and start their usual bombing and machine-gunning. Each time the column stopped, I wondered if some hitch had occurred, and if we were going to be told that the ships would not come for us after all. Yet, in a way, I did not feel things anywhere near as keenly as I would have done normally; I was so exhausted that I lived in a kind of daze, rather as if I were following the doings of someone else in a cinema film. As a matter of fact, to me the one concrete and all-pervading reality was the pain in my feet. My feet seemed to have crowded the war out of my consciousness and to have encroached upon the entire universe. Never before did I guess how important foot-comfort was to one's wellbeing, and to what an extent one could be incapacitated by an ill-fitting pair of boots. At one moment we did think that everything was all up when we heard the distant drone of a plane. Fortunately it dropped a flare somewhere along the coast far to the west and, although we all waited with bated breath, nothing further happened nor did we see or hear any aircraft again.

At last, after many delays, we neared the beach, and I could make out the shadowy outlines of several ships looming faintly through the night some distance from the land. Smaller craft flitted about in the darkness, and crowds of soldiers and sailors jostled each other on the shore. From time to time a pale light flashed out at sea

and was answered by another light from the water's edge. Finally we were on the beach and moving along a rough jetty with sailors all around us; the next moment, though I cannot remember how, we were filing aboard an iron self-propelling invasion-barge manned by several officers and ratings.

What struck me most when we set foot on the barge was the *efficiency* of everything. We seemed to have been translated to another world where everything was more civilized, trimmer, cleaner, better run—even the officers' uniforms were neat. Orders were given in a calm, matter-of-fact manner, there was brightly polished machinery around us and a bell which clanged to the engine-room with a very reassuring sound. Everybody relaxed almost instantaneously; I saw wounded men clapping sailors and even officers on the back or shaking them enthusiastically by the hand, doing everything—short perhaps of kissing them—to show their gratitude and delight for their rescue. And once more the unanimous refrain was on everybody's lips, 'Thank God for the Navy!'

When the barge had filled to capacity, there were a few curt orders, a bell clanged, a screw began to churn, and we slowly put off from the shore. Even as we drew away there was no unseemly rush on the part of those remaining ashore to try and scramble on board. Everything was done with the greatest order and decorum, and again I was reminded of a crowd anxious to catch the train home, but confident that there would be another train later on. When we had left the shore, I made out the shadows of several vessels waiting about half a mile further out, and soon I could distinguish the outlines of a light cruiser, a large transport, and a couple of destroyers. There may have been other ships as well, but it was impossible to see more in the darkness. (I was told subse-

quently that there were in all four cruisers and four destroyers besides the transport S.S. *Glenkyle*.)

Our barge made for the cruiser and willing hands helped us all on board; then I saw, to my surprise, that she was H.M.A.S. *Perth*, the very ship in which I had made the passage to Greece in March—rather a strange coincidence! All the wounded were immediately taken to the *Perth*'s sick-bay, and the ship's doctors took charge of them and told the Australian medical officer and me that we could now rest ourselves and take things easy. The 'other ranks' were given accommodation below, and, after seeing that Kokkinos was all right, I went down to the wardroom where I was warmly greeted by the padre and one or two officers who remembered me from the previous trip. It was then about 11 p.m.

How grand, in fact how *thrilling*, it was to sit in a comfortable leather arm-chair and be able to relax! How wonderful too to be in a warm, pleasant, brightly lighted room, and to sip the delicious cup of steaming cocoa which was immediately brought to us! Later on we were also given some hot soup and some bread and bully beef —but the latter was nicely served on a clean white china plate with mustard and pickles. This seemed to make all the difference in the world, and my appetite suddenly reasserted itself and tried to make up for lost time.

Towards the end of the meal I began to feel so sleepy that I could scarcely keep my eyes open; one of the *Perth*'s officers very kindly offered me his bunk as he himself would be on duty all night. He explained that all the ships would embark as many troops as possible until about 3 a.m. (Saturday, May the 31st) when they would have to push off at full speed and get far enough away from the coast by daybreak to be reasonably safe from air attack. In spite of my fatigue, there was one thing I

longed for even more urgently than sleep and that was to soak my feet in cold water. This I was able to do in the bathroom; my feet were raw, blistered, and chafed; and, though they felt distinctly better after treatment, they were too swollen for me to get my boots on again, big though they were. It was certainly lucky that I had not removed my boots during the latter stages of our march as I had been tempted to do on more than one occasion. Incidentally, I was unable to wear my boots during the whole time I was on board the *Perth* and had to move around in my socks—whenever moving was absolutely necessary. I found the bunk assigned to me particularly comfortable after my hard resting-places of the last few weeks, and I fell asleep the instant my head touched the pillow.

When I awoke it was already 9.30 on the morning of Saturday, May the 31st, and the vibration of the ship told me that we were at sea and steaming fast. It was a great relief to know that we had really got away, and that nothing had gone wrong at the last moment. I went to the wardroom and had a hearty breakfast of toast, margarine (an Australian brand which tasted almost as good as butter), and bully beef with pickles. During the meal I learnt that some fifty officers and three or four hundred men, including the wounded, had been embarked on the *Perth*; more could not be taken without interfering too much with her fighting efficiency. Later I enjoyed another unaccustomed luxury: daily papers, only two days old, represented by the *Egyptian Mail* and the *Egyptian Gazette*! During the last ten days in Crete we had heard no real news, but so many variegated rumours that nobody knew what to believe. It had been said for instance (*a*) that H.M.S. *Hood* had been sunk, (*b*) that British forces had retaken Bengazi, and (*c*) that Syria had been

occupied by the Free French. I now learnt that (a) was unfortunately true, but that, to even matters, we had sunk Germany's newest and largest battleship, the *Bismarck*; that (b) was premature, but that a Libyan offensive had opened with good hopes of success (dashed subsequently at Helfaya Pass), and that (c) had no foundation whatsoever on fact. I have always kept a soft spot in my heart for the above-mentioned journals, and I still remember with what anticipation I would scan them both whenever I had the chance. This was not only for the optimism they always infused into their pages, but also for the little printer's errors with which they would brighten an all-too-sombre world. One of the best of these slips was an astounding statement which appeared in the description given by one of these two papers of the official dedication of the new Garrison Church in Abassia Camp: 'After the ceremony tea was served of the Allmighty.' Surely the scoop of the century—if true!

While I was reading, loud-speakers all over the ship suddenly began to blare 'Warning yellow! Warning yellow!' followed almost immediately by 'Air-raid red! Air-raid red!' At the same time the vibrations of the ship increased as she put on full steam and several loud detonations crashed out overhead. Everyone in the wardroom looked up startled; somehow or other we had taken it for granted that we had done with air attacks when we had left Crete, and here was the same old business all over again—it was really too bad! A naval officer present advised us all to sit on the floor 'just in case anything happened', and we followed his instructions without any argument. We guessed only too well what that 'anything' meant. Fortunately the alert did not last long; we felt the vessel swerve and change her course several times, there was a succession of stunning reports as our ack-ack guns

opened fire, and then the loud-speakers sounded the 'All clear'. Lunch consisted again of soup, bully beef, and pickles; the ship's officers apologized and explained that they were on short rations. It was a marked contrast to my former trip on the 'Perth', when we had enjoyed such delicacies as eggs and rasher—not tinned—bacon and fresh grapefruit for breakfast, not to speak of hors d'œuvre, sweets, and drinks for lunch and dinner.

After lunch I felt irresistibly drowsy again, and my feet were painful even when sitting, so I returned to my bunk and was asleep almost at once. Suddenly the loud-speakers jerked me from my slumbers with 'Warning yellow!' and then 'Air-raid red!' This was most disagreeable, but I did not leave my bunk as, in a ship, one place is more or less as good—or as bad—as another. I did not feel very comfortable, though, at the idea of being cooped up inside a flimsy light cruiser with a good chance of being drowned like a rat in a trap in the event of a direct hit in a vital spot. As it happened, too, one of the ack-ack guns was directly over my head, and each time it fired the noise and concussion was so great that I thought that we had actually been hit. I was partly reassured when I heard a quick succession of detonations coming from exactly the same spot, but I could not help wishing that there was a nice comfortable slit-trench in the middle of the cabin floor. In the meanwhile the engines had again started to throb and vibrate with an accelerated rhythm, and I felt the whole vessel twisting and swerving like a live thing.

Suddenly there was a somewhat louder crash and the ship gave a sharper lurch. I thought: 'That one must have fallen pretty close; let's hope it hasn't damaged the screw!' For a few seconds I waited with my heart in my mouth, but the engines continued throbbing with their

normal beat, and I was delighted to hear the 'All clear' very soon afterwards. 'That was a very near miss!' I thought to myself. It was only the next day that I learnt that it had not been a miss at all. A bomb *had* hit the *Perth*, luckily not in a vital spot, and twelve men had been killed (according to most reports) and others injured. There were two more air attacks during the afternoon, fortunately without result. I heard that the *Glenkyle* also had been dive-bombed, but the ack-ack fire from the *Perth* and the other escorting vessels had driven the enemy off. If I remember aright, the attacks were made on each occasion by five to seven planes; I must say that I again felt very relieved when night fell at last.

I slept through teatime, but got up for dinner, though I cannot recall what we had except that bully beef again figured on the bill of fare. I felt rather awkward sitting at that neatly served table in my socks and my dusty battle-dress, with bloodstains all down the trousers (not my own, but from the wounded I had attended to), when the naval officers all looked so spick and span. But there was nothing I could do about it; and, anyway, I was not the only one present to look untidy. I was very pleased to see that Major Reid and Captain Gilbert were with us, but sorry to learn that Major Murray had not been seen after his departure from Suda. I hoped, however, that he might be on board one of the other vessels.

After dinner we were told that the *Perth* would reach Alexandria at two o'clock in the morning, and we were warned to be ready to leave the ship at once as she would only remain in port a short time. I had another long sleep, but was aroused by the steward at about 1.30 to get ready. Thanks to the long rest and the frequent cold baths, my feet were slightly less swollen, and, by removing the cardboard inner-soles, I was just able to get my boots

on—but it was a stiff struggle. Walking, though, was still very painful.

We arrived at Alexandria at about 2 a.m. on Sunday, June the 1st. The thing which struck me most was that, in spite of the black-out, there were a number of quite bright lights on the quays; it was a long time since I had seen undimmed illumination of any kind at night. As soon as we made fast, the Alexandria military medical authorities took charge of the wounded and removed them in ambulances to the various hospitals. My responsibility was thus ended as far as they were concerned.

After taking leave of the officers of the *Perth* (it was with great regret that I learnt ten months later that this fine ship had been sunk by the Japanese on March the 1st 1942, off the coast of Java), I went ashore with Kokkinos. We passed a makeshift buffet near the quay where we were each given a cup of hot tea, a small packet of biscuits, a slab of milk chocolate, two packets of cigarettes, and a box of matches, and told to report to the Movement Control Officer. The latter decreed that Kokkinos was to join the other Cypriot Pioneers, for whom accommodation had been reserved in a nearby camp. I accompanied Kokkinos to the waiting transport vehicles, where we took leave of each other with a hearty hand-clasp. I was sorry to see him go as he had been a staunch and willing comrade to me during a very anxious period; he was subsequently mentioned in dispatches for his good work in Libya and in Crete, a reward that he well merited.

My own orders were to report to the 8th General Hospital where I would be put up for the night. Captain Gilbert had received similar instructions, and, having at last found a taxi, we reached our destination at about

3.30 a.m., after our driver had lost his way several times in the black-out. On arriving at the hospital, we were told that beds had been reserved for all officers returning from Crete at the United Forces Hostel at the other end of the town. Another drive through the darkness resulted, and it was not until 4.15 a.m. that we finally tumbled into bed for another much needed sleep.

I awoke at about 8 a.m. and was delighted to find that Captain Longridge was occupying one of the beds in the same room. He had been evacuated in the same convoy as ourselves, together with Captain James and Captain Rose. Lieutenant-Colonel Wright was also safe.

Later on I learnt that the evacuation had only been resumed on one more night—three in all—as the German advance could not be stemmed for any longer period.

Incidentally, the evacuation of the walking wounded under the protection of the Red Cross flag is mentioned as follows on page 63 of the War Office publication, *The Campaign in Greece and Crete*:

'On the second day when our men were lying concealed above Sfakia, a staff officer was horrified to see a party of fifty British soldiers marching openly down the road towards the port. He rushed up to them and found that they were a party of walking wounded who had been told by German prisoners that if they discarded their steel helmets and carried a flag with a red cross, the Luftwaffe would leave them alone. This proved to be true. The enemy did not attack them.'

The above account is correct except that we were over a hundred in our party and that we had received *official orders* to throw away our steel helmets. I do not know, of course, if this had been originally suggested by German prisoners.

As a finish, I shall just mention a rather rude joke which was made at our expense: word went round that every man who had been in the Cretan *Evacuation* would be presented with a medal inscribed with the words EX CRETA.

Anticlimax

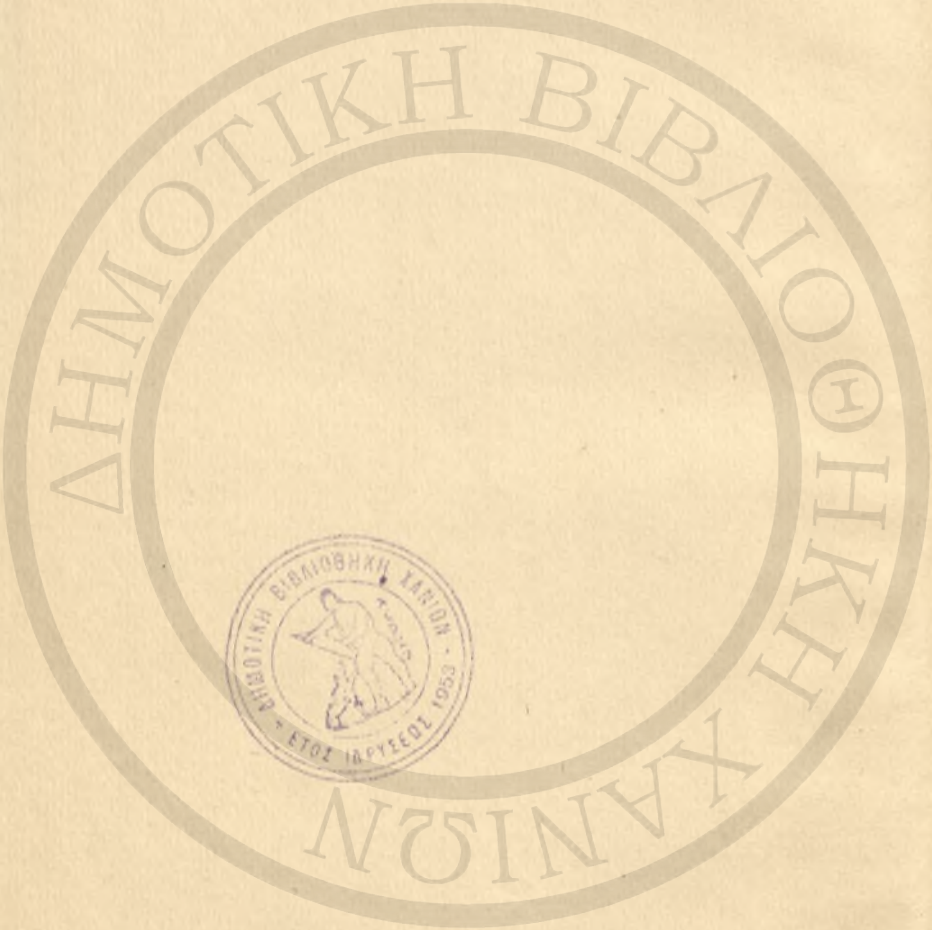
Lieut. T. Stephanides, R.A.M.C.
R.A.M.C. and A.D.C. Base Depot

Information has recently been received from D.M.S. Branch, G.H.Q. M.E., that you embarked from Egypt on 7/3/41 for Greece and disembarked on 1/6/41 ex Crete. As Colonial Allowance is inadmissable for this period an overissue of £15 1s. 0d. has occurred representing 3s. 6d. per day issued over the whole of this period.

Will you please either remit the amount to the Command Cashier or forward written authority for the deduction of the sum from your allowances by suitable monthly instalments? In the latter event will you please inform me the amount that you wish to be deducted each month.

[*Signed*] Lieut. [*illegible*]
for Officer in charge of Officers' Accounts,
M.E.F.

Jerusalem
3/9/41
W.R.S.C.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ΕΤΟΣ ΙΔΡΥΣΕΩΣ 1953